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**GEORGE SOROS:
UKRAINE & EUROPE
A New Solution**

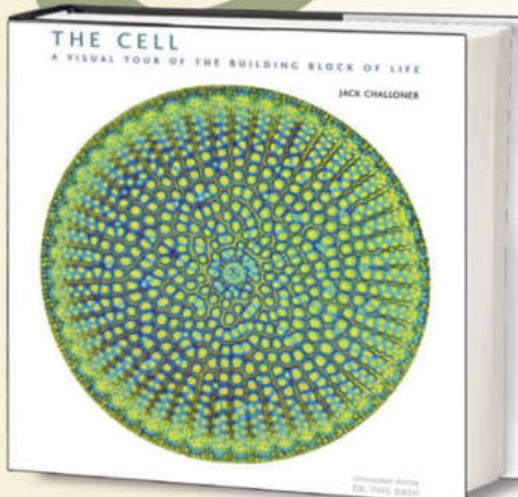
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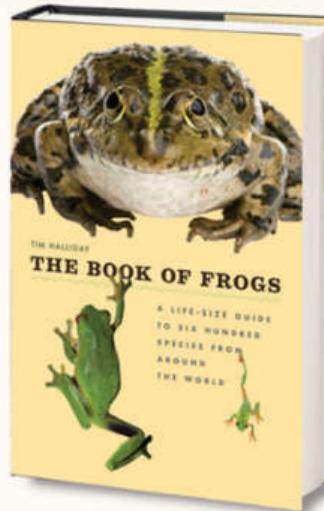
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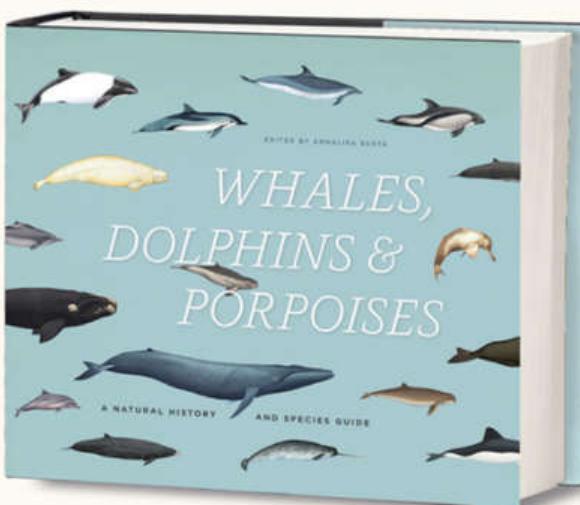
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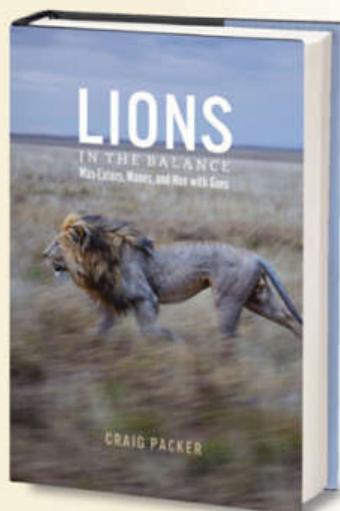
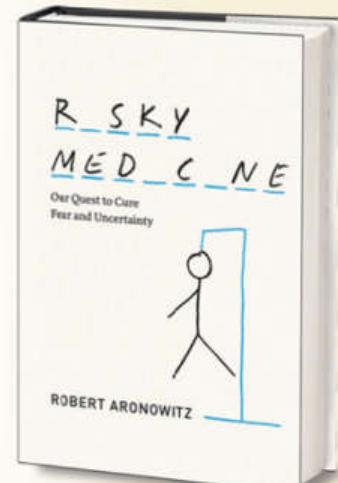
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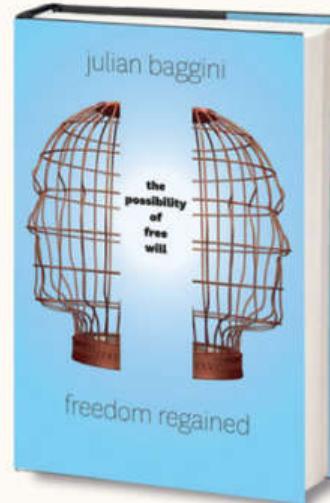
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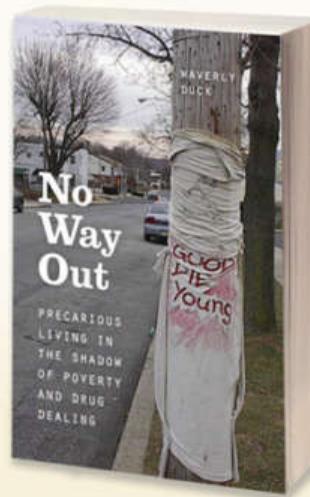
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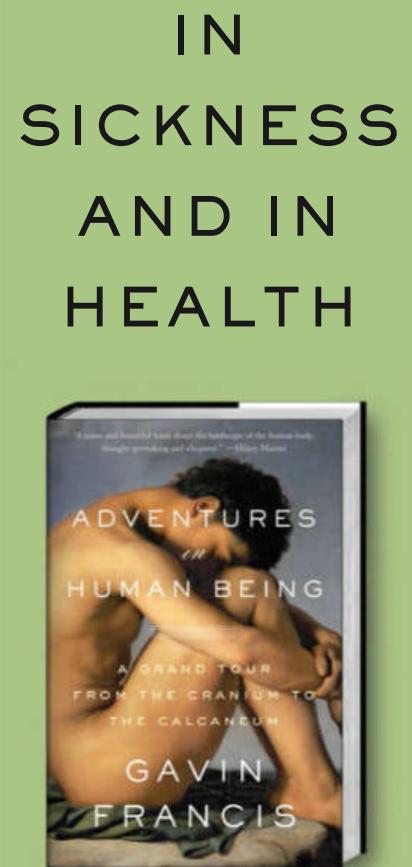
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Alex Traub and Andrew Katzenstein, Editorial Assistants; Max Nelson, Editorial Intern; Sylvia Lonergan, Researcher; Borden Elniff, Katie Jefferis, and John Thorp, Type Production; Janet Noble, Cover Production; Kazue Soma Jensen, Production; Maryanne Chaney, Web Production Coordinator; Michael King, Technical Director & Advertising Sales Manager; Oona Patrick, Classified Advertising; Nicholas During, Publicity; Nancy Ng, Design Director; Janice Fellegara, Director of Marketing and Planning; Andrea Moore, Assistant Circulation Manager; Matthew Howard, Director of Electronic Publishing; Angela Hederman, Special Projects; Diane R. Seltzer, Office Manager/List Manager; Patrick Hederman, Rights; Margarete Devlin, Comptroller; Pearl Williams, Assistant Comptroller; Teddy Wright, Receptionist; Microfilm and Microcard Services: NAPC, 300 North Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

On the cover: John Singer Sargent, *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth* (detail), 1889 (Tate, London). The drawings on pages 6 and 26 are by James Ferguson. The drawings on pages 36 and 49 are by David Levine. The painting by Jackson Pollock on page 44 is in the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum (Art Resource).

The New York Review of Books (ISSN 0028-7504), published 20 times a year, monthly in January, July, August, and September; semi-monthly in February, March, April, May, June, October, November, and December. NYREV, Inc., 435 Hudson Street, Suite 300, New York, NY 10014-3994. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY 10001 and at additional offices. Canada Post Corp. Sales Agreement #40031306. Postmaster: Send address changes to The New York Review of Books, P.O. Box 9310, Big Sandy, TX 75755-9310. Subscription services: www.nybooks.com/customer-service, or email nyrsub@nybooks.info, or call 800-354-0050 in the US, 903-636-1101 elsewhere.



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Ukraine & Europe: What Should Be Done?

George Soros

Because of the structural defects of the euro, the European authorities have had to become masters of the art of muddling through one crisis after another. This practice is popularly known as kicking the can down the road although it would be more accurate to describe it as kicking the can uphill so that it keeps coming back. But Europe now faces at least five crises at the same time: four internal ones—the euro, Greece, migration, and the British referendum on whether to remain in the EU—and an external one, Russian aggression against Ukraine. The various crises tend to reinforce one another. Both the public and the authorities are overwhelmed. What can be done to arrest and reverse the process of disintegration?

Obviously five crises cannot all be solved at the same time. There is a need to give preferential treatment to some of them without neglecting any. I have been strenuously arguing that Ukraine should be given top priority. The internal crises tend to divide the European Union into debtor and creditor countries, the UK and the Continent, as well as “arrival” and “destination” countries. By contrast, an external threat like the Russian aggression against Ukraine ought to unite the European Union.

There is a new Ukraine that is determined to become the opposite of the old Ukraine. The old Ukraine had much in common with the old Greece that proved so difficult to reform: an economy that was dominated by oligarchs and a political class that exploited its position for private gain instead of serving the public. The new Ukraine, by contrast, is inspired by the spirit of the Maidan revolution in February 2014 and seeks to radically reform the country. By treating Ukraine like a second-class Greece that is not even a member of the European Union, Europe is in danger of turning the new Ukraine back into the old Ukraine. That would be a fatal mistake because the new Ukraine is one of the most valuable assets that Europe has, both for resisting Russian aggression and for recapturing the spirit of solidarity that characterized the European Union in its early days.

I feel I am in a strong position to make this argument because I have an intimate knowledge of the new Ukraine through both my Ukrainian foundation and my own involvement in the country. At the beginning of this year, I developed what I called “a winning strategy for Ukraine” and circulated it among the European authorities. I also outlined this strategy in these pages.*

I argued that sanctions against Russia are necessary but not sufficient. President Vladimir Putin has developed a very successful interpretation of the current situation with which to defend himself against the sanctions. He claims that all of Russia’s economic and political difficulties are due to the hostility of the Western powers, who

want to deny Russia its rightful place in the world. Russia is the victim of their aggression. Putin’s argument appeals to the patriotism of Russian citizens, and asks them to put up with the hardships—which include financial instability and shortages—that the sanctions cause. The hardships actually reinforce his argument. The only way to prove Putin wrong is by establishing a better balance between sanctions against Russia and support for Ukraine.

My “winning strategy” advocates effective financial assistance to Ukraine,

violation of the Minsk II agreement of February 11, 2015—prevent the new Ukraine from succeeding by launching a large-scale military offensive. But that would be a political defeat for Putin. It would reveal the falsehood of his interpretation of the conflict with Ukraine; and a military conquest of part of eastern Ukraine would place a heavy economic and political burden on Russia.

President Putin has gained a temporary tactical advantage over Ukraine because he is willing to risk large-scale



Vladimir Putin and Angela Merkel during peace talks over eastern Ukraine, Minsk, Belarus, February 2015

clamoring to reduce their contributions to the EU budget. The shortage of funds is particularly acute in the eurozone, which has no budget of its own.

The European authorities under German leadership mishandled the Greek crisis. They started out by providing emergency loans to Greece at punitive interest rates; they imposed their own program of reform and micromanaged it instead of allowing Greece to take ownership and control of the reforms; and they always lent too little too late. The Greek authorities are far from blameless but the primary responsibility lies with Germany because it was in charge. The Greek national debt has become unsustainable but the European authorities are now unwilling to write down their loans to Greece.

A dispute over this point between them and the IMF has greatly complicated the recent and current negotiations. The authorities have corrected some of their mistakes—for instance, they insist on “bailing in” rather than “bailing out” bondholders (bailing in requires bondholders to write down the value of their bonds). But they repeat others. The biggest mistake has been to treat Ukraine in the same way as Greece. The new Ukraine seeks to be the opposite of Greece and, although it is not a member, it is actively defending the European Union against a military and political threat from Russia.

As I argued in my original case for a winning strategy, helping Ukraine should be treated as a defense expenditure. Seen in this light, the current €3.4 billion contribution from the European Union to the IMF-led rescue package for Ukraine is wholly inadequate. The European Union has the appropriate fiscal tool—the Macro-Financial Assistance mechanism (MFA)—that, with appropriate modifications, could be used to overcome the shortage of funds in the EU budget. The MFA allows the European Union to borrow funds from the financial markets, making use of its almost completely unused triple-A credit.

The EU budget has to allocate only 9 percent of the amount lent to Ukraine as a noncash reserve requirement against the possibility of a future default. In comparison, US budget rules imposed a 44 percent noncash reserve requirement on the latest \$1 billion credit guarantee the US gave Ukraine, so the budgetary burden of the \$2 billion US contribution to the IMF-led assistance package is actually greater than that of the European Union. But the MFA framework agreement expired in 2009 when the Lisbon Treaty was introduced and needs to be renewed in order to be used on a larger scale. Allocating 1 percent of the EU budget to the defense of Ukraine seems appropriate; this would allow the European Union to contribute as much as €14 billion annually to the IMF-led assistance program—a contribution that would be large enough to allow for the European Union to do “whatever it takes” to help Ukraine succeed.

The Minsk II agreement of February 2015 followed a major military defeat

which would combine large-scale budgetary support with affordable political risk insurance, along with other incentives for the private sector. Coupled with the radical economic and political reforms that the new Ukraine is eager to introduce, these measures would turn it into an attractive place for investment. The linchpin of economic reforms is the restructuring of the state gas monopoly, Naftogaz, moving from the current artificially low prices for gas to market-determined prices and providing direct subsidies for gas purchases to needy households.

The political reforms center on establishing an honest, independent, and competent judiciary and media, combating corruption, and making the civil service serve the people instead of exploiting them. These reforms would also appeal to many people in Russia, who would demand similar reforms. That is what Putin is afraid of. That is why he has tried so hard to destabilize the new Ukraine.

If Ukraine’s allies combined the sanctions against Russia with effective assistance for the new Ukraine, no amount of propaganda could obscure the fact that Russia’s economic and political problems are caused by Putin’s policies. He could, of course—in clear

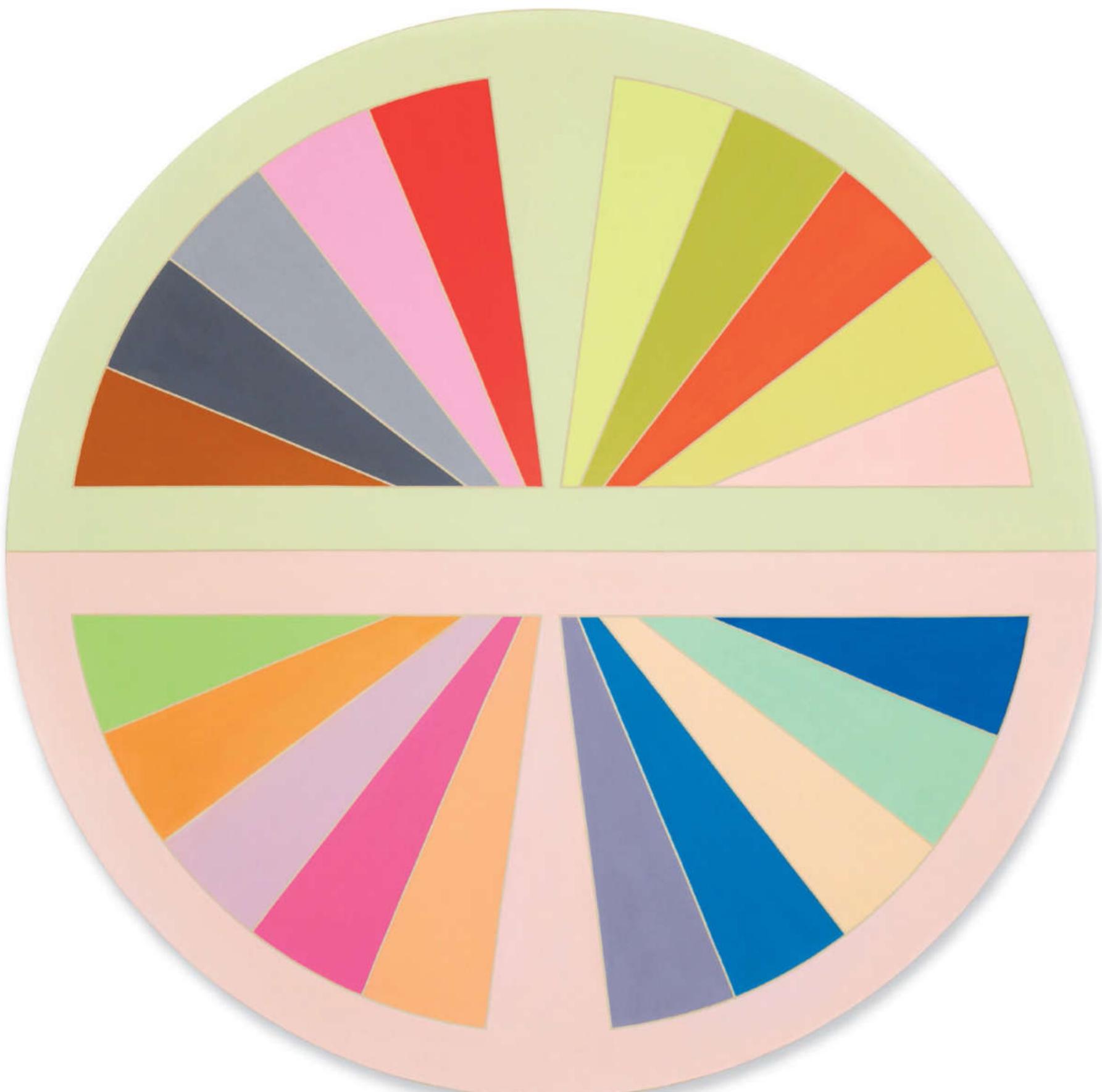
and even nuclear war while Ukraine’s allies are determined to avoid a direct military conflict with Russia. This has allowed him to alternate between hybrid war and hybrid peace at will, and he has exploited this advantage to the full. Ukraine cannot prevail over Russia militarily because President Putin can mobilize more and better-armed forces than Ukraine and its allies on the battlefield. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko had to learn this lesson at great cost. But surely Europe and the US can outbid Russia financially.

This argument for European and American support had some impact among Ukraine’s allies but my assertion about their willingness to provide large-scale financial support proved to be wrong, at least until now. I attribute this to two factors. One is the Greek crisis, which was an outgrowth of the euro crisis and set a bad example for the European Union to follow in Ukraine. The other is the Minsk agreement itself that, for reasons explained below, induced the European authorities to continue keeping Ukraine on a tight financial leash.

The euro crisis has created an acute shortage of funds for budgetary purposes. The EU budget of €145 billion is only about one percent of the GDP of the member states, but Europe is barely growing and member states are

*“A New Policy to Rescue Ukraine,” *The New York Review*, February 5, 2015.

FRANK STELLA: SHAPE AS FORM



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inflicted on Ukraine by the separatists, strongly assisted by Russia. Ukraine was desperate for a cease-fire and negotiated under duress. The Minsk II agreement guaranteed a special status to the separatist enclaves in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine and implied that Ukraine would subsidize them. President Putin exploited his advantage by keeping the text of the agreement deliberately ambiguous. It called for the Ukrainian government to negotiate with representatives of the Donbas region without specifying who they are.

The agreement was signed by Presidents Putin, Poroshenko, and François Hollande, and by Chancellor Angela Merkel. This has set a trap for the last two. They wanted an agreement bearing their signatures to hold; if it fails it must be Russia that scuttles it, not Ukraine. They were also anxious to avoid a military confrontation. This attitude led them to tolerate Russian and separatist violations of the cease-fire yet to insist that Ukraine should observe it to the letter. By taking a neutral position on the question of how President Poroshenko would meet the requirements of the ambiguous agreement, they reinforced President Putin's advantage.

After the agreement was reached, Ukraine came close to financial collapse because of delays in delivering the second IMF-led rescue package until March 11, 2015. The low point was reached in February when the Ukrainian public lost confidence in the national currency, the hryvnia. Official transactions were suspended and the hryvnia traded on the black market between thirty and forty to the dollar that day. Since then the currency has recovered to about twenty to twenty-five hryvnia to the dollar. A precarious financial stability has been reestablished but only at the cost of accelerated economic contraction. The sudden drop in the exchange rate led to higher inflation, a substantial drop in living standards, and a large reduction in imports; this has helped to narrow the trade deficit. At the same time, the budget has benefited from lower expenditures on social benefits for the general public and on the wages of government employees.

When I visited Ukraine this April, I found a troubling contradiction between objective reality, which was clearly deteriorating, and the reformist zeal of the new Ukraine that was under tremendous economic, political, and military pressure but still moving forward with its reforms, which were having a cumulative effect.

During 2014, the reform program for a new Ukraine was in the planning stage; only in 2015 did it result in a large number of laws being passed to meet the requirements of the IMF and, more recently, the Minsk agreement. Even so, the oligarchs—industrialists who use political influence to enrich themselves—were more experienced in defending their interests than the reformers were in curbing them. Just when the economy was on the brink of collapse and political tensions were at a peak, the government had to face a challenge from the most powerful oligarch, Igor Kolomoisky, who tried to use his militia to retain his control over a subsidiary of Naftogaz. The govern-

ment was forced to resist this and managed to defeat him.

That was a turning point. Since then, the central bank has been exercising strict control over the banking system, although recapitalizing the banks will take time. Other oligarchs, notably Dmytro Firtash and Rinat Akhmetov, are being reined in. Regrettably, this happens on a case-by-case basis and not yet by the application of the rule of law. Efforts to reform the police and introduce online services in government and transparency in official procurement have made more progress. But the reformers are encountering resistance at every step and the general popula-

time being, she used up much of her political capital in the process. The loss will be sorely felt by the new Ukraine, which needs all the support it can get in complying with the Minsk agreement.

The ambiguity of the Minsk agreement has forced the two sides into a charade where the task is to pass the obligation to make the next move to the other side. Kiev has been a fast learner. Under prodding from its allies it established the special status of the Donbas enclaves by passing a law that quoted the ambiguous text of the Minsk agreement verbatim. This has created a financial problem for President Putin by starving the enclaves of funds until

Petro Poroshenko and Vladimir Putin



tion is increasingly dissatisfied both with the slow speed of reforms and the continued decline in living standards. So the stress under which the reformers operate continues to increase and may reach a breaking point at any time.

The Greek crisis greatly intensified Ukraine's problems by diverting the attention of the European authorities from Ukraine and reinforcing their tendency to treat it as yet another Greece. The effect on Chancellor Merkel has been especially detrimental. She had behaved as a truly European leader in standing up to President Putin but remained hesitant about giving wholehearted support to Ukraine. When it came to Greece, she abandoned her characteristic caution in order to prevent a Greek exit from the euro. This brought her into conflict with her own party and her minister of finance, Wolfgang Schäuble, who had the backing of her party. While she managed to keep Greece in the eurozone, at least for the

they are willing to hold elections in accordance with Ukrainian law.

But it would be risky for Ukraine's allies to push President Poroshenko too far in making unilateral concessions to the separatists. As the recent bloodshed in front of the Ukrainian parliament demonstrated, ultranationalist elements are on the verge of rebellion. In short, the political and economic condition of the new Ukraine is extremely precarious.

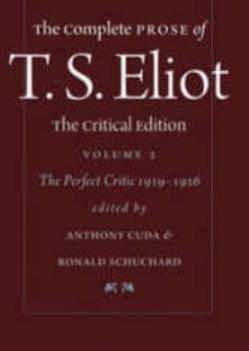
A critical examination of the recent Greek negotiations reveals where they went wrong. Greece should not have taken precedence over Ukraine and Ukraine should not have been treated as yet another Greece. A similar examination of the Minsk agreement leads to a more equivocal conclusion. Ukraine's European allies fell into a trap, but the current impasse has brought one important benefit: it has stopped Russia from carrying its ceasefire violations beyond the point where

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it can deny them. It would be a pity to lose this advantage.

This analysis leads logically to a new winning strategy for Ukraine. Ukraine still should be reinstated as the top priority of the European Union because the new Ukraine is one of its great assets. Every effort should be made not only to preserve the new Ukraine but to assure its success. If by helping Ukraine the European Union could effectively rebuff the Russian menace, then most of the European Union's other priorities would fall into place; if it fails, the other objectives would be pushed further out of reach.

How can the success of the new Ukraine be assured? The analysis on which the original winning strategy was based remains valid. It was and is clear that President Putin can always show Russia to be stronger than Ukraine and its allies by escalating its use of force. Ukraine cannot militarily prevail over Russia. This means that it cannot regain its territorial integrity, at least in the short term, but it can maintain its moral and political integrity. When it comes to a choice, the latter is by far the more important. The new Ukraine is eager to undertake radical economic and political reforms. It has a large population and a battle-tested army willing to defend the European Union by defending itself. Moreover, the spirit of volunteerism and self-sacrifice on which the new Ukraine is based is a highly perishable good: if it is depleted it will take a generation to replace it.

Chancellor Merkel has put the political and moral integrity of the new

Ukraine under tremendous stress by pushing President Poroshenko to observe the Minsk agreement to the letter even if President Putin does not. This brought the benefit, however, of keeping the military conflict within bounds, an achievement that needs to be preserved. Attaining some degree of political and military stability has to be one of the objectives of a winning strategy.

It is the second part of the winning strategy that is missing. Ukraine's allies have to decide and declare that they will do "whatever it takes" to enable Ukraine not only to survive but to introduce far-reaching economic and political reforms, and to flourish in spite of President Putin's opposition. This approach would require significantly more money than is available within the current budget of the European Union. The two prongs of this updated winning strategy—keeping military conflict within bounds and providing Ukraine with adequate financial support to carry out radical reforms—have to be carefully reconciled because they are liable to interfere with each other.

The original strategy called for Ukraine's allies to declare their commitment to do "whatever it takes" at the end of June in conjunction with extending the sanctions on Russia. The European Union missed that deadline. The next opportunity will arise at the end of the year and it should be combined with a promise to reduce the sanctions on Russia if it fulfills its obligations under the Minsk agreement. This will greatly enhance the chances of success by offering a significant material reward to Russia for abiding

by the Minsk agreement as well as a face-saving way out of its conflict with Ukraine.

The prospects of the Minsk agreement holding have greatly improved over the past few months. The weakness of oil prices and the further downward slide of the ruble have put renewed pressure on the Russian economy. But the decisive factor has been the decline in Russian oil production. Output has been falling year over year, and for the first time, both the quantity and quality of the petroleum output fell this year between the months of June and July. This means that the sanctions are biting and the lack of spare parts is accelerating the depletion of existing oil fields. Putin could compensate his cronies for their financial losses by allowing them to take over the properties of the less reliable oligarchs; but the only way he can arrest a general decline of the oil industry is by having some of the Western sanctions lifted. This consideration now outweighs the threat that the eventual prosperity of the new Ukraine poses. The fact that the period of maximum danger has passed without a large-scale military attack indicates that Putin has chosen to rely on more subtle means to destabilize the new Ukraine.

It is all the more important that Ukraine's allies should embrace the modified winning strategy outlined here. The change in Putin's attitude gives them more leeway to do so. They can provide some immediate financial support to Ukraine in order to relieve the financial and political stress without provoking countermeasures from Russia. And they must prepare the ground for a declaration at the end of the year promising to do "whatever it takes" to help the new Ukraine to succeed. That means that they must start to establish an MFA framework agreement now because the process will take several months to complete. It cannot begin without prior approval from the German Ministry of Finance.

There are some welcome signs that Chancellor Merkel is moving in the right direction. She moved far ahead of the German public and business community when she used her leadership position to forge European unanimity in imposing sanctions on Russia. It was only after the downing of the Malaysian airliner in Ukraine that the German public caught up with her. She took an uncharacteristic political risk in order to keep Greece in the euro-zone. She faced intense internal opposition, but that did not stop her from taking another bold step by announcing that Germany will process as many as 800,000 asylum seekers in 2015.

By doing so Germany has set a positive example for other member states to follow; it also has implicitly abandoned the Dublin Regulation, which requires asylum seekers to register and remain in the country of arrival and has been a

source of friction between the "arrival" and "destination" countries. This has brought about a dramatic shift in public attitudes toward asylum seekers. There has been an outpouring of sympathy that started in Germany and spread to the rest of Europe. If this trend gained momentum, it could lead to a positive resolution of the migration crisis.

Chancellor Merkel has correctly recognized that the migration crisis could destroy the European Union, first by causing a breakdown of the Schengen Treaty, which allows free movement within Europe, and eventually by undermining the common market. It would be an appropriate continuation of her recent risk-taking actions if she now combined firmness toward Russia with greater trust and support for Ukraine. The United States is already more firmly committed to the new Ukraine than most European governments; President Obama could therefore play a constructive role in persuading Chancellor Merkel to move in this direction. With their joint support, the new winning strategy for Ukraine has a realistic chance of success. And success in Ukraine should give the European Union enough momentum to find a positive resolution of the various other problems it faces.

Chancellor Merkel's bold initiative toward asylum seekers could have far-reaching effects. She has challenged the German anti-euro party, but that party was already divided in its opposition to immigrants and is likely to collapse under the weight of public sympathy for asylum seekers. This may encourage President Hollande to take on the National Front in France, which is split by the animosity between its founder and his daughter; and it may encourage Prime Minister Cameron to successfully challenge the anti-immigrant agitation of UKIP. This could transform the political landscape of the European Union.

There is a danger that Europe's preoccupation with the migration crisis could once again divert attention from what in my judgment is an even more fundamental issue: the fate of the new Ukraine. This would be a tragic error. As I have argued here, the new Ukraine is the most valuable asset that Europe has. Losing it would cause irreparable harm: it could create a failed state of more than 40 million people and become another source of refugees. But by helping the new Ukraine, the European Union could save itself. By doing "whatever it takes" to enable the new Ukraine not only to survive but to flourish, the European Union would achieve a dual objective: it would protect itself from Putin's Russia and it would recapture the spirit of cooperation and solidarity that used to fire people's imagination in its early days. Chancellor Merkel has already rekindled that spirit toward asylum seekers. Saving the new Ukraine would truly transform the political landscape in Europe. □

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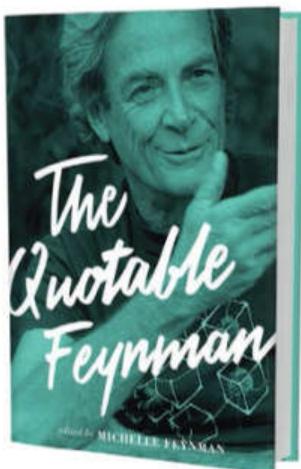
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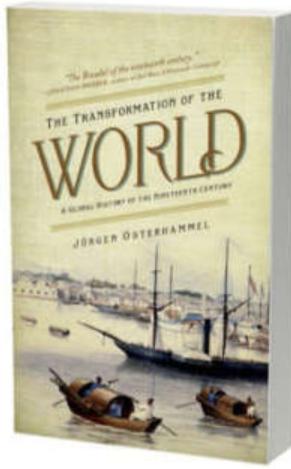
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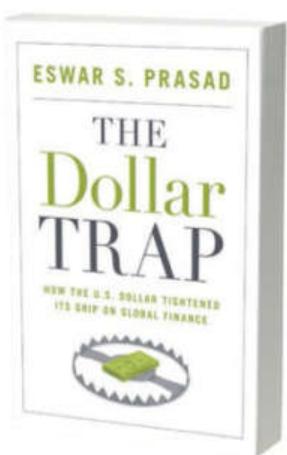
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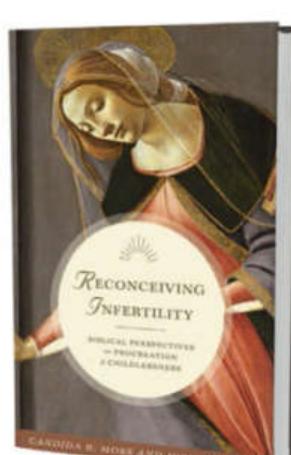
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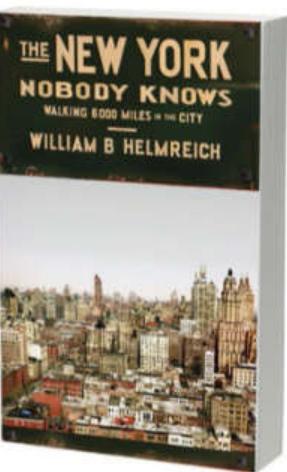
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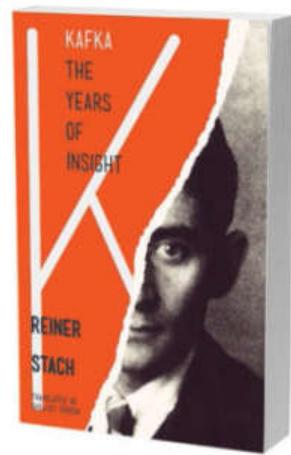
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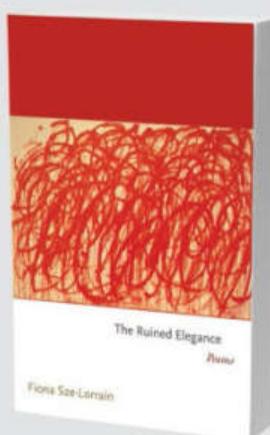
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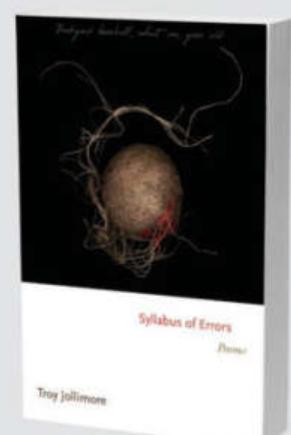
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Book of Numbers

by Joshua Cohen.
Random House, 580 pp., \$28.00

Joshua Cohen's remarkable *Book of Numbers* begins by strongly suggesting that we not read the novel with one forefinger lightly skimming the screen of our portable electronic device: "If you're reading this on a screen, fuck off. I'll only talk if I'm gripped with both hands." After this initial salvo, the narrator natters on without providing much in the way of solid introductory information:

I'm writing a memoir, of course—half bio, half autobio, it feels—I'm writing the memoir of a man not me.

It begins in a resort, a suite.

I'm holed up here, blackout shades downed, drowned in loud media, all to keep from having to deal with yet another country outside the window.

If I'd kept the eyemask and earplugs from the jet, I wouldn't even have to describe this, there's nothing worse than description: hotel room prose. No, characterization is worse. No, dialogue is.... Anyway this isn't quite a hotel. It's a cemetery for people both deceased and on vacation, who still check in daily with work.

Who is telling this story? Where is it taking place? What are we meant to conclude as the narrative voice veers between the impersonal argot of technology and a propulsive confession of misery and neurosis?

Unless you have a taste for ambiguity and frenetic verbosity, for cerebral literary games, and for the sort of fiction in which two of the principal characters have the same name as the author and one of those characters is a writer, you might be tempted to give up. But within a few pages *Book of Numbers* becomes not only clear, but (at least for a while) pleasurable to read.

Its early chapters feature a succession of dazzling set pieces, among them an orgiastic publication party that spills from a bar in Manhattan's meatpacking district into the bar's men's room and beyond:

All of college was crammed into the stall, Columbia University class of 1992, with a guy whose philosophy essays I used to write, now become iBanker, let's call him P. Sachs or Philip S., sitting not on the seat but up on the tank, with the copy of my book I'd autographed for him on his lap—"To P.S., with affect(at)ion" rolling a \$100 bill, tapping out the lines to dust the dustjacket, offering Cal and Kimi! bumps off the blurbs, offering me.

"Cocaine's gotten better since the Citigroup merger."

A knock, a peremptory bouncer's fist, and the door's opened to another bar, yet another—but which bars we, despite half of us being journalists, wouldn't recollect: that dive across the street, diving into the street and lying splayed between the lanes. Straight shots by twos, picklebacks. Well bourbons chasing pabsts. Beating on the jukebox for swallowing our quarters.

Shortly afterward, Cohen manages, in the space of just a few paragraphs, to convey the chaos and horror of September 11:



The Geminoid-DK robot (left) with its creator, Henrik Scharfe, director of the Center for Computer-Mediated Epistemology, Aalborg, Denmark, March 2012

A firetruck with Jersey plates, wreathed by squadcars, sped, then crept toward the cloud. A man, lips bandaged to match his bowtie, offered a prayer to a parkingmeter. A bleeding woman in a spandex unitard knelt by a hydrant counting out the contents of her pouch, reminding herself of who she was from her swipocard ID. A bullhorn yelled for calm in barrio Cantonese, or Mandarin. The wind of the crossstreets was the tail of a rat, swatting, slapping. Fights over waterbottles. Fights over phones.

Survivors were still staggering, north against traffic but then with traffic too, gridlocked strangers desperate for a bridge, or a river to hiss in, their heads scorched bald into sirens, the stains on their suits the faces of friends. With no shoes or one shoe and some still holding their briefcases. Which had always been just something to hold. A death's democracy of C-level execs and custodians, blind, deaf, concussed, uniformly tattered in charred skin cut with glass, slit by flitting discs, diskettes, and paper, envelopes seared to feet and hands—they struggled as if to open themselves, to open and read one another before they fell, and the rising tide of a black airborne ocean towed them in.

By now we understand that our narrator is one of the two fictive Joshua Cohens, a writer whose first book, a Holocaust narrative based on his mother's experience, is published on September 11, 2001. Unable to stop viewing the historic catastrophe and the consequent lack of attention for his book as a personal misfortune ("I was the only NYer not allowed to be sad, once it came out what I was sad about"), Joshua retreats to his apartment, a bleak storage facility in Ridgewood, Queens. He becomes "a legit critic... Mr. Pronunciamento, a taste arbitre and appraise, dispensing consensus,

stages of dissolution. So he is understandably excited by the promise of adventure, travel, and lucrative employment when the technocrat who shares his name (but is now to be referred to only as "the Principal") hires him to ghostwrite a memoir that will tell the Principal's life story and recount the glorious saga of Tetration's founding.

In fact Joshua's work will turn out to involve extensive travel, first to a compound in Palo Alto where he is initiated into the rituals of secrecy and security that will govern every contact with the Principal. His computer is requisitioned and replaced with a new model;

his preferences and vices are registered and monitored; he is told that he must pretend to be a genealogist:

I had no secret, I was no secret, to be Principal's guest was to have nowhere to hide—not just the laptop but, beyond the panes, the surveillance outside, the tall strong stalks of spypquip planted amid the birch and cedar, the sophisticated growths of recognizant CCTV, efflorescing through my bungalow's peephole, getting tangled in the eaves.

If all this seems more appropriate for high-level espionage and illegal snooping than for a Silicon Valley corporation, it is. Thanks to the intercession of Thor Ang Balk, a half-Norwegian, half-Swede whose history closely resembles that of Julian Assange, the truth about Tetration's complicity in government spying will eventually emerge. (In interviews, the real Joshua Cohen has said that he wrote much of this before Edward Snowden's revelations about NSA surveillance, and that an Internet-savvy friend had advised him that such a scenario was unlikely.)

But before these unfortunate aspects of the search engine's mission come to light, Joshua is happy enough to exchange his Ridgewood storage facility for flights on private jets to London, Paris, and the Emirates. At luxury hotels, where sheikhs drop by for a visit and gorgeous Slavic women lounge around the pool, Joshua conducts marathon interviews with the Principal, be-sees his friends to e-mail him porn, and reads his soon-to-be-ex-wife Rach's blog, which mostly consists of complaints about him and their marriage, reports about her career in advertising, and about life with her new boyfriend, an actor. In Abu Dhabi, Joshua saves a Yemeni woman from being beaten by her husband, falls rhapsodically in love with her, and takes her on an expensive shopping spree at the local mall.

Our interest in these characters—and our admiration for Cohen's energy and wit—carry us through the first hundred pages or so of the second section, in which we read about the Principal's childhood as an indulged California kid who grows up in "a good neighborhood



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Pietro Mellini's Inventory in Verse, 1681, the first born-digital publication from the Getty Research Institute (GRI), is the result of years of collaboration in a specially designed online environment between the GRI and the University of Málaga, Spain. It analyzes an unusual manuscript from the collection of the GRI comprising a legal inventory of artworks written as a poem. Scholars and researchers can see the digital facsimile and are granted an unobstructed look at the thought processes, debates, and research on this unpublished manuscript—resulting in innovative ways to share knowledge through digital technology.



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too überaware of its goodness" and calls his parents M-Unit and D-Unit. And we learn more than anyone could possibly want to know about the birth of Tetration.

We assume that the Principal has hired Joshua to produce something resembling those ghostwritten autobiographies of financial geniuses who make stock market fortunes and save corporate empires from going broke, books that contain snippets of helpful business advice and that one sees stacked in pyramids in airport newsstands. Instead *Book of Numbers* gives us sections of the Principal's memoir along with Joshua's comments and corrections, interspersed with pages of raw transcript purporting to tell us precisely what the Principal said.

Before too long, we may find ourselves doing what Joshua calls "that guiltily-flip-ahead-to-gauge-how-many-pages-are-left-in-the-chapter thing." For our powers of comprehension—and our patience—are increasingly tested by long sections that compel us not only to witness but to suffer the extent to which the written word has been pauperized and degraded by the technosavant's belief that the only language that matters is programming language. Nor does it help much when the Principal reveals himself to be one of those egomaniacs who believes that everything he says will be of interest to his listeners.

As a consequence, we get whole pages that, while not entirely without charm, almost defy us to keep reading:

We joined all the religious fora because back then the only pages that existed, smut aside, were about two things, basically: one being the absolute miracle of the very existence of the pages, as like some business celebrating the launch of some placeholder spacewaster site containing only contact information, their address in the real, their phone and fax in the real, and two being the sites of people, predominantly, at this stage, computer scientists or the compscientists inclined openly indulging their most intimate curs, their most spiritual disclosures, as like experimental diabetes treatment logs....

This is how history begins: with a log of every address online in 1992. 130 was the sum we had by 1993, by which time the countingrooms we were monitoring had projected the sum as like quarterly doubling. 623, approx 4.6% of which were dot-com. 2738, approx 13.5%. There were too many urls to keep track of, so we kept track of sites. There were too many sites to keep track of, so we kept track of host domains that only monitored or made public their numbers of registered sites, not their numbers of sites actually set up and actually functional, and certainly not their names or the urls, the universal resource locators of their individual pages, but what frustrated more than the fact that we could not dbase all the web by ourselves was the fact that none of the models we engineered could ever predict its expansion.

Nor do things improve much when Joshua attempts to convert transcript into memoir:

Diatessaron, hosted at[?]/by[?] the Stanford domain...was a site

composed of two pages [EXPLAIN THE DIATESSARON NAME]. One listed [$\geq 400 \leq 600$] sites ordered by main url alphabetically within category. The other listed [$\geq 400 \leq 600$] the same sites ordered by domain or host alphabetically within category. All listings were suburled, meaning that each site's pages were listed individually, until that policy had to be abandoned for practical considerations [REMINDER OF EXPLOSIVE GROWTH OF ONLINE], summer 1994.

To make matters even more daunting, long passages—and sometimes entire pages—of the memoir that Joshua is writing for the Principal have been crossed out; strikethroughs bisect every word. That these sentences have be-

terminated through this medium, which could not be expressed in any human language, and that was its perfection.... It took approx millions of speakers and thousands of writers over hundreds of years in tens of countries to semantically switch "invest" from its original sense, which was "to confer power on a person through clothing." Now online it would take something as like one hundred thousand nonacademic and even nonpartisan people in pajamas approx four centiseconds each between checking their stocks to switch it back.

Reviewers have compared *Book of Numbers* to the fiction of Thomas Pynchon and David Foster Wallace, but the work of William Burroughs also comes



Hewlett-Packard's data center, Palo Alto, California, 2013

and that what Cohen has constructed is an impassioned report on the Miltonic battle between our human souls and the satanic seductions of the Internet. Every garbled paragraph of barely intelligible jargon has been a form of protest against technology's attempts to undermine our privacy, to subvert the language, and to turn the individual into a processor programmed to convert information into consumer desire. Part of what Cohen appears to value and to want to protect about humanity is its sheer messiness—our vanity, pettiness, lust, selfishness, our political incorrectness, our nostrils filled with "the smell of burning ego"—as opposed to the sterility, the grim predictability, the mechanized functionality of the robot.

To this end, Cohen courageously makes his protagonist a less than exemplary human being: a porn addict who adores a woman with whom he has no common language and who has only minimal sympathy for the wife whose blog post about her miscarriage might be more touching had its tone been less simpering and had she refrained from using the phrase "got preggs."

Cohen's novel can be read as a sustained lament for clarity of language, for literature, for the reader who delights in learning new words, for the mind that sees the dictionary as a treasure, and for the "physical" books that were a source of comfort and solace during Joshua's childhood:

My necessities were books. I read a book at school, another to and from school, yet another at the beach, which was the closest escape from my father's dying. Though when I walked alone it was far. Though I wasn't allowed to walk alone when younger—so young that my concern wasn't the danger to myself but to the books I'd bring, because they weren't mine, they were everyone's, entrusted to me in return for exemplary behavior, and if I lost even a single book, or let even its corner get nicked by a jitney, the city would come, the city itself, and lock me up in that grim brick jail that, in every feature, resembled the library.

come so much more laborious to read helps us to persuade ourselves that we are meant to skip them. Alternately, we may be *more* likely to persist, if only to find out what Joshua omitted and to speculate about his reasons. So we read on, though the process has become slower and substantially more taxing.

It takes effort to avoid becoming impatient with the Principal's banal slogans, his neologisms ("splenda" is a term of high praise), and his verbal tics; perhaps unsure about whether to use "as" or "like" in a sentence, he invariably uses both. More often than we might wish, we ask ourselves: Could I really be the only reader who has no idea what this means?

Clearly, these mystifications are intentional, and are part of Cohen's point: how hard it's become to make ourselves understood, except by our computers. Reading the novel, we are perpetually reminded of the way in which power confers the right not to care about—not to bother—making sense, and of the technocrat's pride in having converted "human language," evolved over centuries, into computer-generated algorithms that can be altered in moments:

Each time each user typed out a word and searched and clicked for what to find, the alg would be educated. We let the alg let its users educate themselves. So it would learn, so its users would be taught. All human language could be de-

to mind. Both writers share a dark malign humor about eroticism and about the grim dystopia that awaits us; neither seems much interested in making things easy for his readers. Indeed the most maddening qualities of Cohen's book may also be the most admirable: his refusal to make concessions, his insistence on writing what he wants, however trying and potentially vexing.

Near the end of *Book of Numbers* is a section that not only brings us full circle back to the opening sentence's insistence that the novel not be read on a screen but also partly explains why Cohen might want us to have slogged through so many pages of crossed-out type:

Computers keep total records, but not of effort, and the pages inked out by their printers leave none. Screens preserve no blemishes or failures. Screens preserve nothing human. Save in the fossiliferous prints left behind by a touch.

But a page—only a page can register the sorrows of the crossings, bad word choice, good word choice gone bad, the gradual dulling of pencil lead....

A notebook is the only place you can write about shit like this and not give a shit, like this. Cheap and tattered, a forgiving space, dizzyingly spiralbound, coiled helical.

The passage confirms what we have intuited throughout the novel: that what we may have mistaken for aggression and provocation has in reality been an expression of grief and loss;

As long as we maintain—or simply remember—our love for books that can be held in our hands, for pages that can be turned, the hostile incursions of the digital, Cohen suggests, haven't triumphed completely. We still have an alphabet that can be arranged into meaningful combinations. The problem is how vigorously we are being persuaded that it's no longer important to understand or care about what those combinations mean.

We finish *Book of Numbers* at once disturbed and heartened—that is, with some of the same mixed emotions we may feel after watching *Citizenfour*, Laura Poitras's documentary about Edward Snowden. It's probably too late to unplug, to undo the damage, to roll back the system of surveillance that's been so stealthily put in place. On the other hand, Snowden's bravery and Cohen's literary gifts—among them, his quick, tough-minded intelligence, his humor, his nervy refusal to be ingratiating, and his willingness to risk irritating his readers—suggest that something is possible, that something still might be done to safeguard whatever it is that makes us human. □

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Sargent:

Portraits of Artists and Friends

an exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery, London, February 12–May 25, 2015; and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, June 30–October 4, 2015.

Catalog of the exhibition by Richard Ormond, Elaine Kilmurray, Trevor Fairbrother, Barbara Dayer Gallati, Erica E. Hirshler, Marc Simpson, and H. Barbara Weinberg.

Skira Rizzoli, 256 pp., \$60.00

At the age of fifty-one, with his work in high demand on both sides of the Atlantic, John Singer Sargent swore off painting portraits. He had been eager for some time to escape the confines of the studio, the pressures of multiple sittings, and society portraiture altogether. “No more paughtraits,” he wrote to a friend in 1907. “I abhor and abjure them and hope never to do another especially of the Upper Classes.” He had been charging a thousand guineas a portrait “in order to have fewer to do,” he told another friend, but price did not discourage his affluent clientele.¹ A Max Beerbohm cartoon shows the portly, bearded artist peering out the window of his London studio in alarm at a queue of fashionably dressed ladies, with uniformed bellhops holding places in line for more.

Sargent made exceptions to the portrait ban for friends, and for eminences such as Lord Curzon, the archbishop of Canterbury, John D. Rockefeller, and Woodrow Wilson (he turned down Pierpont Morgan). Yet for the most part, once he had slipped the silken shackles of commissions, he turned his attention to painting murals for the Boston Public Library, and to doing more of what he had loved all his life: traveling, often with artist friends, and working outdoors in natural light.

The “off-duty” paintings he did primarily for his own pleasure tend, not surprisingly, to be looser, more intimate and experimental than his formal grand-manner portraits, and about ninety of them are currently on view at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art in an exhibition called “Sargent: Portraits of Artists and Friends.” Organized by the National Portrait Gallery in London, where it opened last spring, and curated by Richard Ormond with Elaine Kilmurray, the coauthors of the definitive Sargent catalogue raisonné (eight volumes so far), it brings together from public and private collections a glorious selection of some of the artist’s finest work. For New York, the Met’s Elizabeth Kornhauser and Stephanie L. Herdrich have added works from the museum’s own extensive Sargent collections, including twenty-one on paper.

Sargent seems to have known everyone, and his cultural tastes ranged from Wagner and Voltaire to Javanese dancers and Charlie Chaplin. Very much in evidence here are the vitality and



John Singer Sargent: Dr. Pozzi at Home, 1881

technical virtuosity of his work, his insistence, as Richard Ormond describes it, “on the material of paint, on the flux and instability of surface textures, on condensed forms and odd angles of perspective.” The exhibition traces the arc of Sargent’s career over geography and time. Among its abundant pleasures is a quiet sense that the paintings trace the reticent artist’s own profile through his life in art, which is where he most intensely lived.

Sargent, said one of his biographers, was “at home everywhere, and belonged nowhere.” Born in Florence

to American parents in 1856, he grew up in Europe yet always considered himself American. His father, FitzWilliam Sargent, a Philadelphia physician from an old New England family that had made and lost a fortune in shipping, and his mother, the former Mary Newbold Singer, crossed the Atlantic with Mary’s mother in 1854 after the death of a two-year-old daughter, hoping to calm Mary’s “nerves,” and stayed abroad for the rest of their lives. They were living in a rented house near the Ponte Vecchio in January 1856 when their son was born. His grandmother called him “fra Giovanni.”

The family, including two daughters by 1870, lived on Mrs. Sargent’s small inheritance and moved with the seasons—Rome, Naples, Capri, the Tyrol, Dresden, Carlsbad, Venice. John sketched and painted wherever they went. He learned French, Italian, some German and Spanish, and could have had a career as a pianist. In 1870 he won the annual prize in drawing at the Accademia delle Belle Arti in Florence. Paris, to which the family moved in 1874 so that he could study art, was his first settled home.

He enrolled in the École des Beaux-Arts and joined the atelier of the society portrait painter Charles-Émile-Auguste Durand, known as Carolus-Duran. Carolus forbade his students to make academic preparatory drawings on paper; instead, he taught them to load up brushes with paint and work directly on canvas in layers of wet oils, a process that requires spontaneity and speed. His paramount advice was: “Velasquez, Velasquez, Velasquez, étudiez sans relâche Velasquez.”

Sargent studied Velázquez in Spain and Franz Hals in the Netherlands, frequented Paris galleries and exhibitions, and revered Édouard Manet. He visited America for the first time at the age of twenty in 1876. His European worldliness may have shocked some of his new Boston admirers. From Capri in August 1878 he wrote to a childhood friend:

If it were not for one German staying at the Marina, I should be absolutely without society and he is in love and cannot talk about anything but his sweetheart’s moral irreproachability. We are going over to Sorrento in a day or two to visit her, and I have agreed to keep her husband’s interest riveted to Vesuvius, Baiae, Pozzuoli and other places along the distant opposite shore.

His first major portrait, exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1879, was of Carolus himself, inscribed (in French) “to my dear master M. Carolus Duran, his affectionate pupil/John S. Sargent. 1879.” It was an astonishing debut. Sargent posed the charismatic dandy at an asymmetrical tilt, leaning to his right and slightly forward as if about to get up and speak. White frilled shirt cuffs blaze against a fawn-colored jacket. A viewer’s eye is drawn to the painter’s articulate hands, the left bent askew against a thigh, the right, deftly foreshortened, almost caressing a carved wooden cane. Sargent gives the figure volume and weight with tonal shades—his strongest portraits capture exactly this sense of powerful physical presence. Edmond de Goncourt reported Degas asking “with spirit, . . . ‘have you seen Carolus’s cuffs and the veins in his hands, filled by the beat of a Venetian pulse?’”

Carolus introduced Sargent to the subject of another highly theatrical portrait, this one commissioned: *Dr. Pozzi at Home* (1881). The father of modern French gynecology, Samuel-Jean Pozzi made revolutionary advances for women’s reproductive health and served as surgeon to the stars of the Parisian

¹A guinea is a little more than a pound sterling. In the early 1900s a thousand guineas was worth about \$5,000—equivalent to roughly \$75,000–100,000 today.

beau monde. An outrageously attractive aesthete and sensualist, he belonged to the circle around Proust and Robert de Montesquiou, had many lovers (including Sarah Bernhardt), collected art, invited audiences to watch his surgical procedures, and founded a society, the League of the Rose, dedicated to the confessing and acting out of sexual experiences.

Sargent portrays him looking like a sexy cardinal or pope in a full-length scarlet dressing gown, in a room of deeper red, evoking earlier portraits by Velázquez and Van Dyck. "The symphony of reds," notes Elaine Kilmurray in the exhibition's excellent catalog,

is insistent and visceral (a gesture to the sensational aspects of his medical practices), but the flashiness is offset by the refinement of his finely drawn surgeon's hands, exquisitely pleated white shirt and delicately embroidered slippers.

The elegant long fingers may also allude to Pozzi's skills as a lover. *Dr. Pozzi* was the first Sargent painting exhibited at London's Royal Academy, in 1882.²

The scandal over Sargent's *Madame X* radically changed the artist's life. Fascinated by the cold beauty and dramatic self-presentation of Virginie Gautreau, the Louisiana-born wife of a French banker, he painted her portrait without commission, hoping it would gain him recognition. It did, but not the kind he wanted. Exhibited at the Salon of 1884, the painting shocked Paris. The ensuing scandal surprised both artist and subject. A prominent social figure, Madame Gautreau was something of an empty celebrity, known for being known. With her strange makeup (her powdered skin looks deathly lavender-green), haughty pose (Sargent accentuates her avian profile, and the awkward torque of her right arm gives a nervous tension to her whole body), and brimming décolletage (the strap of her dress was slipping off her right shoulder in the original portrait—Sargent later repainted it), she appears, and probably was, morally lax. That both model and artist were American may have added to the fire. Having agreed to pose for the portrait, Madame Gautreau disavowed it and went into seclusion for months. Sargent kept it in his studio until 1916, when he sold it to the Metropolitan Museum, saying, "I suppose it is the best thing I have done."³

²In June 1885 Sargent wrote to Henry James introducing "Dr. S. Pozzi, the man in the red gown (not always), a very brilliant creature! & ...the unique extra-human Montesquiou.... They are going to spend a week in London and I fancy Montesquiou will be anxious to see as much of Rossetti's and Burne Jones' work as he can. I have given him a card to BJ."

³The portrait was originally titled, less sensationally, *Madame****, as if to protect the identity of the sitter, although no one in Paris society would have failed to recognize Madame Gautreau. In 1916 Sargent asked the Met to disguise her name again, and the painting has since been known as *Madame X*.

As demand for his portraits plummeted in the aftermath of the scandal, Sargent thought he might have to give up art altogether and go into music or business. He was just twenty-eight. His fellow Euro-Americans James McNeill Whistler and Henry James had for some time been urging him to move to England, and by 1885 the prospect seemed attractive. Sargent spent that summer and the next with a group of American painters and writers at a village called Broadway in the Cotswolds, working outdoors on a series of Impressionistic projects under the powerful influence of Claude Monet.

He had met Monet in the 1870s, and they became good friends in the 1880s. On a visit to Giverny, Sargent painted the sketch *Claude Monet, Painting, by the Edge of a Wood*, probably in July 1885, and kept it for the rest of his life. His vantage point behind the artist doing what he himself is doing—painting *en plein air*—reveals the landscape study Monet is working on, which appears to be *Près à Giverny (Meadow with Haystacks Near Giverny)*. Sargent began acquiring Monet landscape paintings in 1887—ultimately he owned four. When an American collector in 1889 threatened to buy and deport the object of an earlier French art-world scandal, Manet's *Olympia*, Sargent and Monet waged a successful campaign to purchase the painting for the Louvre.⁴

The friendship between the two artists lasted into the 1900s. In February 1901 they watched Queen Victoria's funeral procession together from a house opposite Buckingham Palace, and in March Sargent helped secure a space from which Monet could paint Leicester Square at night. Ultimately, however, he turned away from Impressionism's optical mixes of pure color and its emphasis on texture and pattern over form and structure to work in the Velázquez/Carols vein, with ensembles of tone. In an apt but most likely apocryphal story, he is said to have one day asked Monet to lend him a tube of black paint, and been astounded to learn that his companion had none.

Henry James proved enormously instrumental in helping Sargent find congenial new artistic and social worlds in England, as well as patrons on both sides of the Atlantic. In October 1887 he published a lavish appreciation of his compatriot's work in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. Sargent's early portraits, James wrote, offered the "slightly 'uncanny' spectacle of a talent which on the very threshold

ity at the Salon of 1882 were Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* and Sargent's *El Jaleo*. At the Manet sale of February 1884, Sargent bought *The Portrait of Mademoiselle Claus*—a preparatory study for *Le Balcon*—and *Irises*. He was one of the few foreign artists to attend a memorial banquet for Manet in January 1885.



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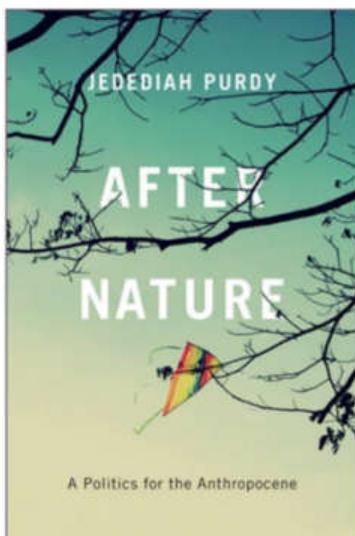
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of its career has nothing more to learn." He went on to describe many of the paintings in vivid detail (a Venetian interior is "bathed in a kind of transparent shade"), and concluded: "There is no greater work of art than a great portrait—a truth to be constantly taken to heart by a painter holding in his hands the weapon that Mr. Sargent wields."

Americans were quicker to take up Sargent than Europeans. James introduced the artist to Isabella Stewart Gardner, the wealthy Boston collector who became one of his good friends and most steadfast patrons. She hung his great flamenco picture, *El Jaleo*, and many more of his paintings and watercolors alongside old master works in her Venetian-style palazzo on the Fenway. One of the few people who liked *Madame X*—she had bought a preparatory oil sketch—she commissioned Sargent to paint her own portrait in 1887. He posed her against a wall of dramatic Venetian brocade, in an odd yet powerful painting: the circular pattern in the brocade gives her a halo; pearls encircle her neck and waist, and her arms, shoulders, and clasped hands form yet another loop. Mrs. Gardner was no beauty—Sargent said her face looked like "a lemon with a slit for a mouth"—but he captured her character and tense energy. Her husband, along with several art critics at the portrait's first public showing, hated it. Mrs. Gardner kept it in a private room at Fenway Court during her lifetime—and it has only now left Boston for the first time to come to the Met.

Sargent and James already had a number of friends in common. After visiting the consumptive Robert Louis Stevenson and his wife at Bournemouth, a health resort on the south coast of England, in June 1885, Sargent reported to James: "I was very much impressed by him; he seemed to have the most intense nature I had ever met."

His two surviving paintings of Stevenson render that essential intensity precisely. In one, the writer looks like a giant vertical spider, pacing and talking, tweaking his mustache, separated by a mysterious open doorway from his wife, who reclines on a sofa dressed as an Indian princess and practically falls off the edge of the canvas. That Sargent did not flatter his sitters had been clear for some time, and like many of those not flattered, the Stevensons loved this painting. Fanny Stevenson told her mother-in-law: "Anybody may have a 'portrait of a gentleman' but nobody ever had one like this. It is like an open box of jewels."

Sargent was as generous a friend to other artists (among them Paul César Helleu, Albert de Belleroche, and Antonio Mancini) as Henry James was to him, introducing them to patrons, promoting their work, lending or giving them money. One spring he told his friend Asher Wertheimer that the young French pianist and composer Léon Delafosse, in London to give two concerts, would commit suicide on the upcoming Whitsunday unless he could spend it in the country—would Wertheimer invite the man to his country house for the day?

In 1887 Sargent took a three-year lease on a studio on Tite Street in Chelsea that Whistler had recently occupied, though as always he traveled for long stretches of the year—to America,

Italy, Spain, North Africa, the Levant. Impermanence seemed to be his permanent condition—as late as 1894 he said he was still only "vaguely" living in London. He eventually bought the studio at 31 Tite Street—across the street from Oscar Wilde and not far from Henry James—and a few years later combined it with 33 next door. He lived there for the rest of his life. Two superb portraits of British women, *Mrs. Hugh Hammersley* and *Lady*

creating mural decorations for cultural institutions in Boston. According to Fairbrother, Sargent "knew that these radiant [travel] pictures sustained his reputation as an exponent of Impressionist experiment, and mainstream critics gladly talked up their vitality and brilliance." The large themes addressed by the murals—religious history, the Great War, classical mythology—"reflected an ambitious need to offset his costly, fashion-



John Singer Sargent: *Madame X (Madame Pierre Gautreau)*, 1883–1884

Agnew of Lochnaw—painted in 1892 and exhibited to wide critical acclaim the following year—opened the floodgates for society commissions. By the time Sargent was elected a full member of the Royal Academy in 1897, he was the leading Anglo-American portrait artist of his generation.

Ten years later he gave up painting "paughtraits." The art historian Trevor Fairbrother writes in the exhibition catalog about the two kinds of work Sargent turned to after renouncing portraiture—painting watercolors and oils inspired by his travels, and

tinged portraits with an erudite legacy."

Are these works in the end better or more important than the portraits? Crowds do not line up to see the murals the way they do for an exhibition of Sargent's people. Is this an instance, not uncommon, of an artist giving up what he does best in order to do something more serious, weighty, lasting? Perhaps. Yet to the extent that Sargent was concerned about his artistic legacy, "Portraits of Artists and Friends" makes clear that he need not have been.

TV vs. the Internet: Who Will Win?

Jacob Weisberg

Television Is the New Television: The Unexpected Triumph of Old Media in the Digital Age
by Michael Wolff.
Portfolio/Penguin, 212 pp., \$26.95

Over the Top: How the Internet Is (Slowly but Surely) Changing the Television Industry
by Alan Wolk.
Self-published, 166 pp., \$12.95 (paper)

1.

Between 1999 and 2009, annual revenues in the music industry declined from \$14.6 billion to \$6.3 billion, according to the market analysis firm Forrester Research. The music business was first attacked from below by illegal file sharing on Napster and subsequently from above by Apple's iTunes, which unbundled fourteen-dollar CDs into ninety-nine-cent songs. Even as user habits have shifted again, away from owning digital audio files such as MP3s and toward renting music from streaming services like Spotify and Pandora, recording industry revenues have remained flat, below the level where they were in the 1970s.

Newspapers followed a similar pattern, sustaining a much greater destruction of value in a shorter period of time. From 2006 to 2012, revenues fell from \$49.3 billion to \$22.3 billion, according to trade association figures. The challengers from below included Craigslist, which turned the multibillion-dollar print classified business into a multimillion-dollar online business. Google diverted other advertising dollars while online news sapped print circulation.

These disruptions left the question of when the television business would face its turn on the dissecting table. But despite sharing the vulnerabilities of other long-standing media—shrinking audiences, changing consumption patterns, new competition for ad dollars—the television dinosaur has only grown fatter. According to the research firm SNL Kagan, cable TV revenues rose from \$36 billion in 2000 to \$93 billion in 2010. Profits of the giant conglomerates—ABC/Disney, NBC Universal, Fox, Viacom, and CBS—have continued to climb in the years since. Cable operators thrive despite antiquated technology, extreme customer dissatisfaction, and the challenge of Internet streaming services like Netflix and Amazon, which now create their own original content as well. Even local broadcast stations remain highly profitable despite the declining audiences for their core news product, thanks in part to a surge of political spending following the *Citizens United* decision in 2010.

How the television business has eluded the bitter fate of other media is the subject of Michael Wolff's new book, *Television Is the New Television*. "For sixty years, television, given massive generational, behavioral, and technological shifts, has managed to change...not so much," he writes. To

Wolff, the industry's imperviousness to digital disruption counts as nothing short of heroic. In an assemblage of digressive riffs, he praises television's stodginess in defense of profits. This stands in contrast to newspapers and magazines, which he derides for embracing digital transformation in ways that have only accelerated their decline. For example, he criticizes *The New York Times* for relinquishing its attachment to a print edition that still provides nearly 80 percent of its reve-

cable bundles in favor of Internet services such as Netflix—as an insignificant phenomenon. But even if it gathers steam, as recent evidence suggests may be happening, cord cutting leaves Comcast and Time Warner Cable, the largest cable companies, in a win-win position, since they provide the fiber optic cables that deliver broadband Internet to the home as well as those that bring TV. Even if you decide not to pay for hundreds of channels you don't watch, you'll pay the same monopoly

ing consumers the à la carte option many would prefer. It's the big five television companies who refuse to parcel out their offerings—(1) ABC/Disney, which owns ESPN, A&E, and Lifetime; (2) NBC Universal, which owns USA, Bravo, and the Weather Channel; (3) Fox, which owns Fox Sports, F/X, and National Geographic; (4) Viacom, which owns Comedy Central, BET, and MTV; and (5) CBS, which owns Showtime, the Movie Channel, and the CW. For these companies, the indirect charges they receive for their content have become the pot of gold at the end of the advertising rainbow.

The positive aspect to this consumer-unfriendly economic model may be better television. Most commercials are directed at young people, based on the advertising industry's belief in establishing brand loyalty early. That's why so much ad-supported programming caters to the tastes of teenagers. Adults, however, pay cable bills, and this fosters the kind of long-arc narratives and complicated antiheroes that appeal to more mature audiences. Wolff argues that the economics of pay TV have driven the emergence of "storytelling on a riveting, epic, how-we-live-now scale: the baby boom trying to understand itself and the world it had wrought."

There is indeed some wonderful stuff on TV these days, but prestige programs like *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad* may owe more to obscure cable channels trying to distinguish themselves in a vast marketplace than to the third-party payer system embedded in the mumbo-jumbo of cable bills. The independent cable channel AMC continues to depend on advertising, and its competitors like Bravo, A&E, History, and Lifetime make their money from the advertising revenue of prime-time lineups of tawdry reality shows. Wolff idealizes the new television in a way that suggests he hasn't spent much time watching *Duck Dynasty*. He doesn't appear to be all that interested in what's actually on TV. His broad embrace of it serves a different purpose: as a cudgel to attack the digital media that have been getting much attention. Wolff devotes a lot of his book to smacking the latest generation of digital media companies: *BuzzFeed* (a "staff of engineers able to game the social media world"); the *Forbes* website ("a shell game, in which, through a series of ever-developing stratagems, random eyeballs...were tricked or promoted into coming to the site"); and *Vice* ("so bizarre is the notion that *Vice*'s young male audience will watch international news that puzzled media minds can only seem to conclude it must be true").

To Wolff, good old-fashioned television delivers something that these social optimizers, clickbaiters, and video clip-jobbers can't, which is to keep audiences immersed in stories with a beginning, middle, and end. The economic reason for this, he asserts, is digital overabundance. On the Web, any given page can be seen many times so there are countless opportunities to advertise. This inexorably drives CPMs—cost per thousand page views,



Jeffrey Tambor as the transgender character Maura in *Transparent*, an Amazon Original series that can be watched only on the Internet

nue in favor of the much smaller, "prof-
itless space" online.

Wolff contends that television learned a useful lesson from the gutting of the music industry. The record companies were at first lackadaisical in protecting their intellectual property, then went after their own customers, filing lawsuits against dorm-room downloaders. Under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, passed in 1998, sites hosting videos such as YouTube appeared to be within their rights to wait for take-down notices before removing pirated material. But Viacom, led by the octogenarian Sumner Redstone, sued YouTube anyway. Its 2007 lawsuit forced Google, which had bought YouTube the previous year, to abandon copyright infringement as a business model. Thanks to the challenge from Viacom, YouTube became a venue for low-value content generated by users ("Charlie Bit My Finger") and acceded to paying media owners, such as Comedy Central, a share of its advertising revenue in exchange for its use of material. "Instead of a common carrier they had become, in a major transformation, licensors," Wolff writes. Where it might have been subsumed by a new distribution model, the television business instead subsumed its disruptor.

Wolff is dismissive of newer threats to the business. He regards cord cutting—customers dropping premium

to stream *House of Cards*. (This won't provide much comfort, however, to companies that own the shows, which stand to lose revenue from both cable subscribers and commercials priced according to ratings.)

For Wolff, the resilience of the TV business finds its embodiment in Les Moonves, whom he describes as the "self-satisfied, overpaid" CEO of CBS, "with his singular passion and talent for old-fashioned American television." In 2005, Viacom spun off its less desirable assets, including CBS and its storied news division, and handed them to Moonves to deal with. A decade later, CBS is worth more than the rest of Viacom combined, including MTV, VH1, and Nickelodeon. Moonves accomplished this through skillful negotiations with the cable operators, whom he realized couldn't very well offer their customers channel packages that didn't include CBS local stations. In 2013, Moonves demanded dramatically larger retransmission fees from Time Warner Cable and made his stations unavailable to Time Warner when he didn't get them. After a month without CBS, TWC capitulated.

Thanks to these "retrans" fees, you pay eight dollars a month for ESPN whether you watch sports or not. It's not the cable operators who are deny-

the unit by which advertising prices are typically measured—below the level that can support the creation of high-quality content in any form.

Some of Wolff's judgments about digital trends hit their mark. But his analysis is too categorical and in places simply wrong. As younger audiences shift from television to digital consumption of media, advertising dollars are following them. Prices for desirable ad placements on the Web remain high, even as the value of generic traffic on most websites goes down. In the end, Wolff's hostility toward digital media leads him to overstate both TV's immunity to disruption and his case that, because of the law of supply and demand, nothing of value can ever become a real business online.

2.

You can't understand Wolff's scorn for new media without reading *Burn Rate* (1998), the entertaining, self-lacerating account of his first foray as a digital entrepreneur. In the earliest days of the Internet, Wolff had the insight that people would need to know what sites were worth visiting, and he began publishing books and online reviews to guide them. *Your Personal Network*, as his site was called, was soon swept away by web portals like AOL and Yahoo that provided e-mail, news, and search engines all on a single site.

But before that happened, Wolff nearly became rich, nearly went bankrupt, and finally walked away disillusioned both with the Internet and with many of those trying to build a

business around it. In that book, Wolff depicts himself as both a visionary and a charlatan, ready to cheat and deceive in the attempt to cash out of his ticking time bomb of a start-up before it blows. "How many fairly grievous lies had I told?" he asks himself. "How many moral lapses had I committed? How many ethical breaches had I fallen into?" The justification for his bad behavior is implicitly that, hey, other people were even worse. If Wolff remains hyper-vigilant about new media con artists, his own confessions should be kept in mind.

At the conclusion of *Burn Rate*, Wolff declares himself sick of the Internet racket and ready to go back to the honest business of journalism. He turned his hand to writing a column for *New York* magazine, then for *Vanity Fair* and a variety of other publications before arriving at his unlikely present home, *USA Today*. By the time of *Autumn of the Moguls* (2003), a book derived from his *New York* columns, Wolff has turned as cynical about the old media world as he was about the Internet. Now it is the "titans, poseurs, and money guys" of his subtitle, surveyed with a gimlet eye from his table at Michael's, who can't possibly get away with it much longer. The media business, Wolff declares, is collapsing because of inflated salaries, bloated egos, and dumb ideas. In view of his liberal politics, it is curious that the one mogul who wins his admiration is Rupert Murdoch, whom he praises for the purity of his ruthlessness. This relatively flattering portrayal might have helped to provide the entrée Wolff required for his next book, *The Man Who Owns the*

News (2008), a biography with which Murdoch, his lieutenants, and all of his family inexplicably cooperated.

As a media writer, Wolff specializes in sizing people up and cutting them down. An hour spent with Alan Rusbridger, the former editor of *The Guardian*, he writes in British *GQ*, is "unpleasant in the exertions required to penetrate his lack of transparency." The secret of Tina Brown's career is "failing upward." Even among "semi-retarded" newspaper business reporters, the late David Carr was "quite a nitwit." Contempt expressed so promiscuously has a tendency to lose potency. But if Wolff the columnist is consistently mean, he is seldom dull, often writing what others inside the New York media bubble think about each other but would only say in private.

In recent years, Wolff has continued to ricochet back and forth between old media curmudgeon and new media visionary. In 2007, he founded a site called *Newser*, whose goal, he declared in an interview at the time, was to replace the network news. This was a grandiose notion for an undercapitalized would-be competitor to the *The Huffington Post*, which did little more than rework stories found elsewhere and crown them with punchier headlines. Go to *Newser*, whose motto is "Read less. Know More," and you'll find a collection of editorial content in a form adapted to generate Facebook traffic: "Set Foot On This Island And You May Not Leave Alive" and "Super 5-Year-Olds: 5 Great Things This Week."

According to the site, "Michael Wolff is the founder of *Newser* and guides its overall direction." The experience of launching and running a second digital content startup goes unmentioned, however, in his new book, perhaps because *Newser* embodies the kind of bottom-feeding clickbait that the author of *Television Is the New Television* dismisses as "lower-end junk." While he ignores the awfulness of most television programming, Wolff offers no respect to even the better digital-first destinations—*Vox*, *Vulture*, *538*, *The Atavist*, *The Awl*, *Quartz*, *Slate*, *Salon*, *Tablet*, *Politico Magazine*, *The Onion*, *Funny or Die*, and—on their better days—*BuzzFeed*, *The Huffington Post*, *Business Insider*, *Gawker*, and *Vice*. As businesses, these free sites are challenged by heavy dependence on advertising, but they produce a great deal of original, high-quality content.¹ May the real sin of some of these outlets be that they've found traction that eluded *Your Personal Network* and *Newser*?

Like the venture capitalists currently pumping investments into the new startups, Wolff can be counted on to reverse his biases every few years or so: content is king; content is a dismal commodity; content is king again. The chief difference is that he is on a countercycle, endorsing old models when others embrace disruption and vice versa. Wolff has the right to change his mind, of course, and it is hard to think of any media sage who has been either consistent or correct over the past two de-

cades. But at some point his blanket assertions, unsupported by evidence and animated by the conviction that anyone who thinks what he thought not very long ago must be weak-minded, begin to lose their charm.

3.

Whatever he believed ten years ago, is Wolff right that it's now springtime for the old television *machers*? To answer that question, it's necessary to step back from his latest embrace of the pre-digital in favor of more evidence-based analysis. An excellent place to start is Alan Wolk's self-published book *Over the Top: How the Internet Is (Slowly but Surely) Changing the Television Industry*. Wolk, a well-connected industry analyst, points to a very different future for the television business than the one Wolff depicts. Wolk thinks that the sector is poised for major disruption, even if it's unclear from which side or how quickly the transformation is likely to come.

In an industry where all the big players are still making loads of money, Wolk explains, no one has an interest in upsetting the apple cart. But that hardly makes the current disposition secure. If "the world still sits in front of a television," as Wolff asserts, that becomes less true with the passing of every measured month. Time-shifted viewing (recording programs so you can see them when you want) and streaming video (watching video on the Internet) mean that conventional television audiences are shrinking fast, except for live sports and news events like the Fox News Republican debate.

For the June–July period, the top thirty cable networks were down more than 10 percent in prime-time viewers compared to a year earlier, according to Nielsen. Viewership in the eighteen-to-forty-nine category, which advertisers care about most, fell 20 percent.² The audience for live TV appears to be contracting to a smaller base of passive, older viewers. Most worrisome from a financial perspective is that television is reaching fewer fifteen-to-thirty-five-year-olds, who spend more time engaging with social media on smartphones than staring at freestanding screens. The promise of access to this generation of consumers explains recent investments in the new outlets Wolff regards as valueless, including ABC's stake in *Fusion*, NBC Universal's interest in *BuzzFeed* and *Vox*, and nearly everyone's investments in *Vice*.

When it comes to advertising revenues, declining audiences have so far had an ambiguous impact, sometimes driving up advertising prices for demographic segments that are becoming harder to reach, like children. But this is a melting iceberg model: shrinking real estate may drive prices higher, but at some point, there's not much ground left to stand on. The total volume of "upfront" sales, in which networks command their highest prices for advertising sponsorships on prime-time programs, has been declining along with the reach of live television. What's more, as audiences migrate away from live television, Netflix and Amazon are

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¹For a contrary point of view, see Michael Massing, "Digital Journalism: How Good Is It?" and "Digital Journalism: The Next Generation," *The New York Review*, June 4 and June 25, 2015. I should declare my own interest as chairman and editor in chief of the *Slate* Group.

²"Cord-Cutting Weighs on Pay TV," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 6, 2015.

training viewers to expect entertainment without the interruption of ads.

What used to be television advertising dollars continue to migrate toward several different kinds of ads, whether online video, mobile, search, or digital display advertising. According to a forecast by the Forrester research firm, spending on digital advertising will surpass spending on television advertising in 2016. For television companies, retransmission fees may pick up more of the slack, but recent media company earnings reports indicate that those fees, and the ability of cable companies to pass them along to consumers, may have hit a ceiling. Smaller cable systems have recently been holding out against price increases demanded by

the “last mile” of wiring that brings high-speed Internet into the home. The 1982 breakup of AT&T’s “natural monopoly” on phone service provides a precedent here. A legislative fight on this issue would pit unlovable Comcast and Time Warner Cable against GAFA—Google, Apple, Facebook, and Amazon. The GAFA companies would like to be able to sell pay TV through cables of their own. Or, before any of that happens, the balance of power in the industry may simply shift more dramatically to the GAFA companies, whose long-rumored entry into the TV market is already taking place in the form of original shows available only online, such as the Amazon series *Transparent*. These tech companies

Comedy Central



Stephen Colbert, who has just taken over The Late Show on the CBS television network, on his earlier Comedy Central television show, The Colbert Report

Viacom and others as cable subscription numbers fall.

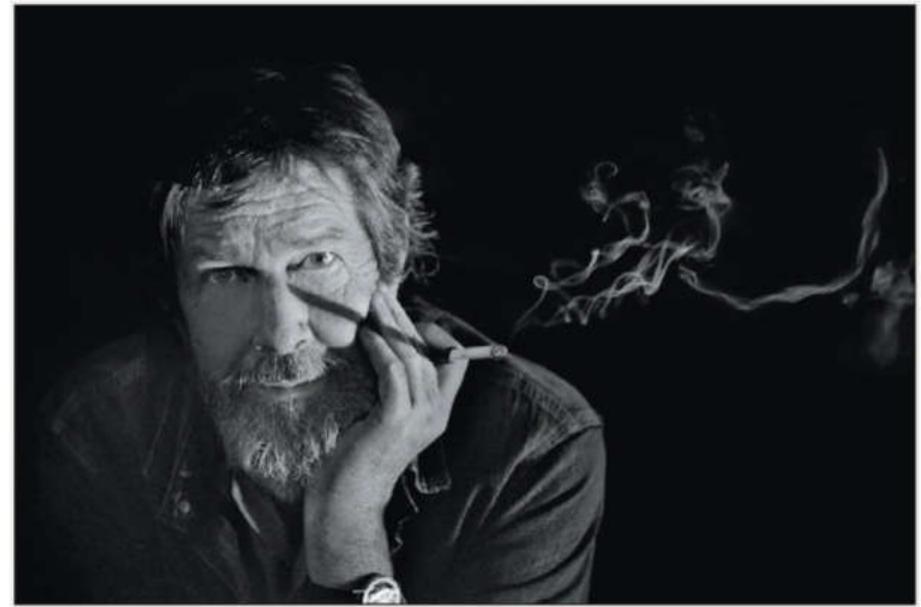
Today, digital content hubs like YouTube, AOL, and Yahoo that deliver the largest audiences, as well as premium sites like *The New York Times*, can demand high prices for ads. They do so especially for “native” ads, i.e., ads similar in form to the surrounding editorial content, and for those that run just before short-form video. Conversely, the future of television may come to look more like digital, with more and more advertising sold “programmatically,” meaning that it targets specific audiences across multiple networks rather than buying on the basis of guaranteed ratings of individual shows. This shift brings the risk for the big five not only of lower prices per thousands of viewers. It also heightens the risk that more of the value of the advertising will be raked off by “ad-tech” intermediaries that target, track, and verify that commercials have been viewed by their intended audiences.

Never underestimate the durability of a monopoly, but the cable companies, with their anachronistic two-thousand-channel grids and 1990s-era set-top boxes, face real vulnerabilities as well. Here the disruption might come through an alternative way of receiving high-speed Internet, such as national or municipal Wi-Fi networks that would transmit the same materials now delivered by cable. Alternatively, the government could force the cable companies to open, for use by competitors,

also have the financial resources to compete for exclusive rights to stream live sports events, another shift that could sound the death knell of live TV.

Wolk’s book is also more interesting than Wolff’s about the way media economics is changing the shape of filmed content. The all-at-once release model, which Netflix pioneered with the Norwegian-American crime comedy *Lilyhammer* in 2012, was the experiment that immediately expanded the market for television auteurs. When a twenty-two-episode season was shown over six months, writers could introduce or kill off characters and plot lines in response to audience reactions. Now writers must rely mainly on their own instincts to deliver a finished season designed for binge viewing. This is another factor making scripted TV more novelistic.

Do these evolving patterns of content distribution and consumption represent disruption or persistence? Wolff’s bias against new media leads him into tautology: that which succeeds demonstrates the durability of television. That which fails to earn immediate profits exposes the shell game of digital media. It’s true that someone binge-watching a bulk-released season of *Orange Is the New Black* on a Wi-Fi-connected laptop is in some recognizable sense watching TV, just as a person reading *The Washington Post* via Facebook on his or her iPhone is reading the newspaper. But it’s hard to accept Michael Wolff’s view that the former represents the triumph of the old and the latter foolish acquiescence to the new. □



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PHOTOGRAPHS BY JAMES KLOSTY

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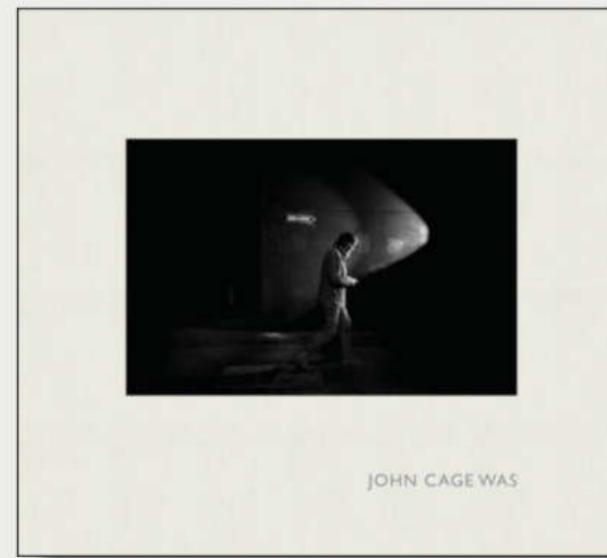
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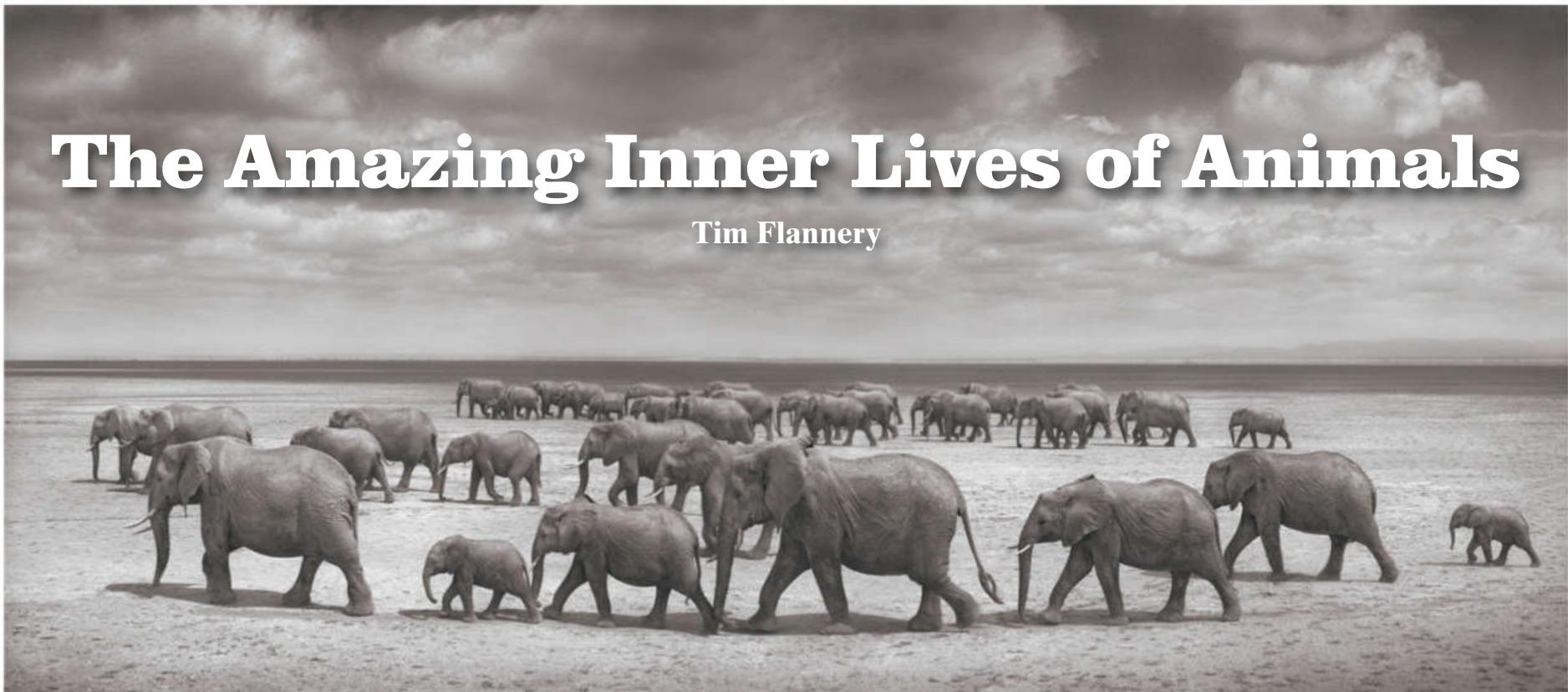
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Edwynn Houk Gallery, New York

The Amazing Inner Lives of Animals

Tim Flannery

Elephant herds crossing a lake bed in the sun, Amboseli, Kenya, 2008; photograph by Nick Brandt

**Beyond Words:
What Animals Think and Feel**
by Carl Safina.
Henry Holt, 461 pp., \$32.00

**The Cultural Lives
of Whales and Dolphins**
by Hal Whitehead and Luke Rendell.
University of Chicago Press,
417 pp., \$35.00

The free-living dolphins of the Bahamas had come to know researcher Denise Herzing and her team very well. For decades, at the start of each four-month-long field season, the dolphins would give the returning humans a joyous reception: "a reunion of friends," as Herzing described it. But one year the creatures behaved differently. They would not approach the research vessel, refusing even invitations to bowride. When the boat's captain slipped into the water to size up the situation, the dolphins remained aloof. Meanwhile on board it was discovered that an expeditioner had died while napping in his bunk. As the vessel headed to port, Herzing said, "the dolphins came to the side of our boat, not riding the bow as usual but instead flanking us fifty feet away in an aquatic escort" that paralleled the boat in an organized manner.

The remarkable incident raises questions that lie at the heart of Carl Safina's astonishing new book, *Beyond Words: What Animals Think and Feel*. Can dolphin sonar penetrate the steel hull of a boat—and pinpoint a stilled heart? Can dolphins empathize with human bereavement? Is dolphin society organized enough to permit the formation of a funeral cavalcade? If the answer to these questions is yes, then *Beyond Words* has profound implications for humans and our worldview.

Beyond Words is gloriously written. Consider this description of elephants:

Their great breaths, rushing in and out, resonant in the halls of their lungs. The skin as they moved, wrinkled with time and wear, batiked with the walk of ages, as if they lived within the creased maps of the lives they'd traveled.

Not since Barry Lopez or Peter Matthiessen were at the height of their powers has the world been treated to such sumptuous descriptions of nature.

Safina would be the first to agree that anecdotes such as Herzing's lack the rigor of scientific experiments. He tells us that he is "most skeptical of those things I'd most like to believe, precisely because I'd like to believe them. Wanting to believe something can bias one's view." *Beyond Words* is a rigorously scientific work. Yet impeccably documented anecdotes such as Herzing's have a place in it, because they are the only means we have of comprehending the reactions of intelligent creatures like dolphins to rare and unusual circumstances. The alternative—to capture dolphins or chimpanzees and subject them to an array of human-devised tests in artificial circumstances—often results in nonsense. Take, for example, the oft-cited research demonstrating that wolves cannot follow a human pointing at something, while dogs can. It turns out that the wolves tested were caged: when outside a cage, wolves readily follow human pointing, without any training.

Safina explains how an evolutionary understanding of the emotions helps us to see even humble creatures as individuals. The chemical oxytocin creates feelings of pleasure and a craving for sociality. So widespread is it that it must have originated 700 million or more years ago. Serotonin, a chemical associated with anxiety, is probably equally ancient: crayfish subjected to mild electrical shocks have elevated serotonin levels, and act anxiously. If treated with chlordiazepoxide (a common treatment for humans suffering from anxiety) they resume normal behavior.

The basic repertory of emotions evolved so long ago that even worms exhibit great behavioral sophistication. After a lifetime studying earthworms, Charles Darwin declared that they "deserve to be called intelligent," for when evaluating materials for plugging their burrows, they "act in nearly the same manner as a man under similar circumstances." Emotions are the foundation blocks of relationships and personalities. Driven by the same complex mix

of emotion-inducing chemicals as ourselves, every worm, crayfish, and other invertebrate has its own unique response to its fellows and the world at large.

Worms and crayfish may have distinct personalities and emotional responses, but their brains are far simpler than ours. Humans fall within a small group of mammals with exceptionally large brains. All are highly social, and it is upon this group—and specifically the elephants, killer whales, bottlenosed dolphins, and wolves—that Safina concentrates. The last common ancestor of these creatures was a primitive, small-brained, nocturnal, shrew-sized mammal that lived around 100 million years ago. The brains, bodies, and societies of these "animal intelligentsia," as we might call them, are each very different, making it hard to understand their lives.

Safina sees and describes the behaviors of the animals he's interested in through the eyes of researchers who have dedicated their lives to the study of their subjects. What is it like to be an elephant? Cynthia Moss, who has lived with the elephants of Amboseli National Park in Kenya for four decades, sums them up as "intelligent, social, emotional, personable, imitative, respectful of ancestors, playful, self-aware, compassionate." It all sounds impressively human, but elephant societies are very different from our own. Female elephants and their young live separately from males, for example, so they have no conception of romantic love or marriage (though the females can be very interested in sex, enough to fake estrus in order to attract male attention).

Much published behavioral science, incidentally, is phrased in a neutral language that distances us from animals. Safina argues that we should use a common language of grief, joy, friendship, and empathy to describe the equivalent responses of both human and other animals. To this I would add the language of ceremony: What other word but "marriage" should be used to describe the ritual bonding, followed by lifelong commitment to their partners, of creatures like the albatross?

Sometimes it is the small things that best reveal shared life experience. When baby elephants are weaned they throw tantrums that rival those of the wildest two-year-old humans. One youngster became so upset with his mother that he screamed and trumpeted as he poked her with his tiny tusks. Finally, in frustration, he stuck his trunk into her anus, then turned around and kicked her. "You little *horror!*" thought Cynthia Moss as she watched the tantrum unfold.

Clans of female elephants, led by matriarchs, periodically associate in larger groups. As a result, elephants have excellent memories, and are able to recognize up to one thousand individuals. So strong is elephant empathy that they sometimes bury their dead, and will return repeatedly to the skeleton of a deceased matriarch to fondle her tusks and bones. Indeed, an elephant's response to death has been called "probably the strangest thing about them." When the Amboseli matriarch Eleanor was dying, the matriarch Grace approached her, her facial glands streaming with emotion, and tried to lift her to her feet. Grace stayed with the stricken Eleanor through the night of her death, and on the third day Eleanor's family and closest friend Maya visited the corpse. A week after the death the family returned again to express what can only be called their grief. A researcher once played the recording of a deceased elephant's voice to its family. The creatures went wild searching for their lost relative, and the dead elephant's daughter called for days after.

Elephants have been known to extract spears from wounded friends, and to stay with infants born with disabilities. In 1990, the Amboseli female Echo gave birth to a baby who could not straighten his forelegs, and so could hardly nurse. For three days Echo and her eight-year-old daughter Enid stayed with him as he hobbled along on his wrists. On the third day he finally managed to straighten his forelegs and, despite several falls, he was soon walking well. As Safina says, "His family's persistence—which in humans facing a similar situation we might call faith—had saved him."

Most of us will never see a wild elephant, much less spend the time observing them that is required to understand them as individuals. But there are animals that share our lives, and whose societies, emotional depth, and intelligence are readily accessible. Dogs are often family to us. And it is astonishing how much of a dog's behavior is pure wolf.

The Canidae—the family to which wolves and dogs belong—is a uniquely American production, originating and evolving over tens of millions of years in North America before spreading to other continents around five million years ago. The American origins of the wolf family did not save them from frontier violence. By the 1920s they had been all but exterminated from the contiguous forty-eight states of the US. Their reintroduction into Yellowstone National Park in January 1995 offered a unique opportunity to follow the fortunes of wolf families as they made their way in a new world. Yellowstone's wolf research leader Doug Smith says that wolves do three things: "They travel, they kill, and they are social—very *social*." But wolves are also astonishingly like us. They can be ruthless in their pursuit of power, to the extent that some will kill their sister's cubs if it serves their ends. But they will also at times adopt the litters of rivals.

The best wolves are brilliant leaders that pursue lifelong strategies in order to lead their families to success. According to wolf watchers, the greatest wolf Yellowstone has ever known was Twenty-one (wolf researchers use numbers rather than names for individuals). He was big and brave, once taking on six attacking wolves and routing them all. He never lost a fight, but he was also magnanimous, for he never killed a vanquished enemy. And that made him as unusual among wolves as did his size and strength. He was born into the first litter of Yellowstone pups following the reintroduction of wolves in the park. Twenty-one's big break came at age two and a half when he left his family and joined a pack whose alpha male had been shot just two days earlier. He adopted the dead wolf's pups and helped to feed them.

A telling characteristic of Twenty-one was the way he loved to wrestle with the little ones and pretend to lose. The wolf expert Rick McIntyre said, "He'd just fall on his back with his paws in the air. And the triumphant-looking little one would be standing over him with his tail wagging." "The ability to pretend," McIntyre said, "shows that you understand how your actions are perceived by others. It indicates high intelligence." That many humans recognize this in dogs, but have failed to see it in wolves, speaks strongly of the need for Safina's book. For dogs are wolves that came to live with us.

The similarities between wolves and humans are arguably more extensive than those between humans and any other animal. Tough, flexible in social structure, capable of forming pair bonds and fitting into ever-shifting hierarchies, we were made for each other. And when we out-of-Africa apes met up with the arch-typical American canids a few tens of thousands of years ago, a bond was created that has endured ever since. Just who initiated the interspecies relationship is hotly debated. The traditional view is that humans domesticated dogs, but Safina

makes a convincing case that the process was driven as much by the wolves as by the humans. The wolves that were better able to read human tendencies and reactions, and were less skittish of human contact, would have gotten access to more food scraps from human camps. And human clans willing to tolerate the wolves would have obtained valuable warnings of the presence of danger from other animals (and other humans). Eventually, Safina says, "we became like each other." The partnership, however, has had some puzzling effects. The brains of dogs, as well as humans, have shrunk since we began living together, perhaps because we came to rely on each other rather than solely on our own wits.

Sperm whales have the largest brains on earth—around six times larger on



An Atlantic spotted dolphin mother and calf, Bimini, Bahamas, 2007

average than our own—while bottlenosed dolphins have the largest brains relative to body size, with the exception of humans. Along with killer whales, these species have a place beside the elephants, dogs, and great apes in the animal intelligentsia. *The Cultural Lives of Whales and Dolphins* is a comprehensive academic work by researchers who have devoted their careers to studying sperm and killer whales. Ocean-going and deep diving, sperm whales are difficult to study, and researchers can as yet offer only a bare sketch of their societies. But it's already clear that their social organization has remarkable parallels with that of elephants. Like elephants, sperm whale females and young often live in "clans" of up to thirty individuals, while adult males, except when mating, live separate lives.

Sperm whale clans possess distinctive "dialects" of sonar clicks. These are passed on by learning, and act as markers of clan identity. They are an important part of the whale's communication system, which enables the creatures to synchronize their diving, feeding, and other activities. So social are sperm whales that females share the care of the young of their clan, for example by staying at the surface with a young whale while its mother dives for food. Clan members are so closely bonded that they spend extended periods at the surface, nuzzling one another or staying in close body contact. As with elephants, clans can gather in large congregations, so it seems reasonable to assume that sperm whales have the capacity to memorize large social networks.

Killer whales (otherwise known as orcas) have a very different social or-

ganization. Without doubt their most unusual characteristic is that all male killer whales are deeply involved with their mother. They never leave their mother's clan, and despite their enormous size (growing to twice the weight of females), their fates remain deeply intertwined with those of their mothers. If their mothers should die, even fully adult males over thirty years old (they can live to over sixty) face an eight-fold increase in their risk of death. Just how and why the orphaned adult males die remains unclear.

Another striking feature of killer whales and near relatives is the extraordinary length of lactation. Short-finned pilot whales lactate for at least fifteen years after birth, even though puberty occurs at between eight and seventeen years. Sperm whales reach sexual maturity at nine to ten years of age, but traces of milk have been found

At times, killer whales have developed special relationships with people. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, at Twofold Bay south of Sydney, Australia, killer whales and humans set up a mutually profitable whaling enterprise. The killer whales would notify the whalers of the presence of humpback whales by performing a ritual in the waters of the bay fronting the whaler's cottagers. The men would harpoon the humpbacks, and the killer whales would hold on to the harpoon ropes to tire the prey.

After a humpback was lanced and killed by the men, they observed the "law of the tongue." The whalers would leave the humpback body for twenty-four hours so that the killers could feast on the lips and tongue. Remarkable proof of this partnership persists, in the form of the skeleton of "Old Tom"—a killer whale whose teeth were worn flat on one side while holding onto harpoon ropes—which can be seen in the killer whale museum in the town of Eden, Australia.

With the exception of our species, killer whales are earth's most capable predators. When they evolved ten million years ago, half of earth's whales, seals, and dugong species became extinct. Because they specialize in a particular food type and are so intelligent, killer whales continue to have a huge impact on their prey. As a result of global warming, killer whales have appeared in Arctic waters. Horrified Inuit describe them as voracious and wasteful killers that have reduced populations of some Arctic mammals by a third.

Safina comes to an unfamiliar but empirically based conclusion: prior to the domestication of plants and the invention of writing, the differences between human societies and those of elephants, dogs, killer whales, and dolphins was a matter of degree, not kind. Why, he asks, has it taken us so long to understand this? Are our egos "threatened by the thought that other animals think and feel? Is it because acknowledging the mind of another makes it harder to abuse them?"

The discovery of nonhuman societies composed of highly intelligent, social, empathetic individuals possessing sophisticated communication systems will force us to reformulate many questions. We have long asked whether we are alone in the universe. But clearly we are not alone on earth. The evolution of intelligence, of empathy and complex societies, is surely more likely than we have hitherto considered. And what is it, exactly, that sets our species apart? We clearly are different, but in light of *Beyond Words* we need to re-evaluate how, and why.

Beyond Words will have a deep impact on many readers, for it elevates our relationships with animals to a higher plane. When your dog looks at you adoringly, even though he or she cannot say it, you can be as sure that love is being expressed as you can when hearing any human declaration of eternal devotion. Most of us already knew that, but have withheld ourselves from a full surrender to its implications. Along with Darwin's *Origin* and Richard Dawkins's *Selfish Gene*, *Beyond Words* marks a major milestone in our evolving understanding of our place in nature. Indeed it has the potential to change our relationship with the natural world. □

Joan Didion: Risk & Triumph

Joyce Carol Oates

**The Last Love Song:
A Biography of Joan Didion**
by Tracy Daugherty.
St. Martin's, 728 pp., \$35.00

We are uneasy about a story until we know who is telling it.

—Joan Didion,
A Book of Common Prayer

It is rare to find a biographer so temperamentally, intellectually, and even stylistically matched with his subject as Tracy Daugherty, author of well-received biographies of Donald Barthelme and Joseph Heller, is matched with Joan Didion; but it is perhaps less of a surprise if we consider that Daugherty is himself a writer whose work shares with Didion's classic essays (*Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, 1968; *The White Album*, 1979; *Where I Was From*, 2003) a brooding sense of the valedictory and the elegiac, crushing banality and heartrending loss in American life. To Daugherty, born in 1955, Didion has long been a visionary, "a powerful voice for my generation." So identifying with his subject, who has suffered personal, familial losses in recent years, as well as a general disillusionment with American politics, the biographer inevitably becomes "an elegist, writing lamentations"; Didion's memoir *Blue Nights* (2011), a meditation upon motherhood and aging as well as an elegy for Didion's daughter Quintana, who died at the age of thirty-nine in 2005, is "not just a harrowing lullaby but our generation's last love song."

Chronological in its basic structure, *The Last Love Song* is not a conventional biography so much as a life of the artist rendered in biographical mode: we pick up crucial facts, so to speak, on the run, as we might in a novel (for instance, in Didion's debut novel *Run River*, 1963), in the midst of other bits of information: "By 1934, the year of Didion's birth, the levees [on the Sacramento River] had significantly reduced flooding." We learn that Didion's first, crucial reader was her mother, Eduene, a former Sacramento librarian descended from a Presbyterian minister and his wife who followed the Donner-Reed party west but decided to split from the doomed group in Nevada in 1846. An acquaintance of the family tells Daugherty that the Didions and their extended families "were part of Sacramento's landed gentry...families who called themselves agriculturalists, farmers, ranchers, progressives, but they were the owners, not the ones who got their hands dirty." With a novelist's empathy Daugherty notes:

For all its visibility and influence, the family felt prosaic, muted, sad to Didion, even as a girl. Clerks and administrators: hardly the heroes of old, surviving starvation and blizzards.... A whiff of decadence clung to the gentry.

Many passages in *The Last Love Song* read with the fluency of fiction, and the particular intimacy of Didion's fiction, as if by a sort of osmosis the

subject has taken over the narrative, as a passenger in a speeding vehicle may take over the wheel. We feel that we are reading about Didion in precisely Didion's terms:

In considering—and not quite hitting—the *real* story of Patty Hearst, Didion felt sure the periphery was the key. She looked for an out-of-the-way anecdote, seemingly insignificant, channeling all of California; the pioneer experience in its modern manifestations;



Joan Didion and John Gregory Dunne, Malibu, California, 1977

AP Images

the historical imperative; the chain of forces shaping Tania [Hearst's nom de guerre in the Symbionese Liberation Army]: a verbal image as immediately impactful as the spread legs, the carbine, and the cobra.

She was after this same effect in *Play It as It Lays*, a "fast novel," a method of presentation allowing us to see Maria in a flash.

A snake book.

A poetic impulse, surpassing narrative.

Somewhere on the edge of the story.

And:

In the final analysis, Didion's attraction to conspiracy tales, particularly in the 1980s, has less to do with the intrigues themselves than with her persistent longing for narrative, *any* narrative, to alleviate the pain of confusion.

"We tell ourselves stories in order to live"—and if the story is not readily apparent, we will weave one out of whatever scraps are at hand; we will use our puzzlement as a motivating factor; we will tell our way out of any trap, or god-damn seedy motel.

Introducing the highly charged topic of Joan Didion and John Gregory Dunne's adoption of their daughter Quintana Roo in 1966, Daugherty writes:

In the mid-1960s, the preferred narrative was *We chose you*.

Positive. Proactive. A comfort to the child.

What the narrative didn't address—a howling silence no boy or girl failed to perceive—was that if *we chose you, someone else chose* to make you available to us.

To relinquish you.

Family law.

Though Daugherty is never less than respectful of his subject he cannot resist the biographer's urge to interpret motives seemingly unacknowledged by



evaluative and change her mind when she saw she'd been wrong, trumped her contrarian streak. If she had a strong capacity for denial, she had an even stronger will to shuck her illusions once she'd exposed them.

"I think of political writing as in many ways a futile act," Didion said. But "you are obligated to do things you think are futile. It's like living. Life ends in death, but you live it, you know."

As a professor of English and creative writing at Oregon State, Tracy Daugherty is, like his subject, steeped in New Critical theories and stratagems. Both the biographer and his subject distrust direct statement and "abhor abstractions" and both are "wary of interpreting behavior as a clue to character." Confronted with Didion's decision not to cooperate with him (though she does not seem to have wished to hamper him), the biographer decides to approach his subject's life as if its truths do not lie easily on the surface of that life but constitute a text (my term, not Daugherty's) to be decoded:

When presented with the private correspondence, diaries, journals, or rough drafts of a writer, I remain skeptical of content, attentive instead to presentation. It is the construction of persona, even in private—the fears, curlicues, and desires in any recorded life—that offers insights.

In this approach Daugherty echoes Didion's acknowledgment of her indebtedness to the English Department at UC-Berkeley, from which she received a BA in 1956: "They taught a form of literary criticism which was based on analyzing texts in a very close way...." And "I still go to the text. Meaning for me is in the grammar.... I learned backwards and forwards close textual analysis."

For all her insight into political intrigue and the bitter ironies of American life in the late twentieth century, Didion's essential interest, Daugherty suggests, has always been language: "its inaccuracies and illusions, the way words imply their opposites"; Didion has many times stated her hostility to fashionable and politically correct dogma, as in her defense of the "irreducible ambiguities" of fiction vis-à-vis the "narrow and cracked determinism" of the women's movement with its "aversion to adult sexual life":

All one's actual apprehension of what it is like to be a woman, the irreconcilable difference of it—that sense of living one's deepest life underwater, that dark involvement with blood and birth and death—could now be declared invalid, unnecessary, *one never felt it at all*.

In this passage Didion anticipates the sentiment of the anthropologist-narrator who recounts, in a stylized Conradian narrative of detachment and analysis, the story of maternal

Years later, in the sobriety of post-September 11 America, here is a portrait of Didion in her "maturity":

[Her] self-correcting quality, her ability to be ruthlessly self-

loss at the core of *A Book of Common Prayer*:

[Charlotte Douglas] had tried only to rid herself of her dreams, and these dreams seemed to deal only with sexual surrender and infant death, commonplaces of the female obsessional life. We all have the same dreams.

But do we? Feminism challenges this romantic passivity, replacing Freud's idea of women's biological destiny with a "destiny" unburdened by gender, like that of men; in her passionately written screed against the very bedrock of feminism, Didion aligns herself with other notable women writers who have scorned the notion of sisterhood. If you have suffered in the "female obsessional life" and if that life has been, for you, in its most profound moments essentially an "underground" life, it will be anathema to be told that others wish to escape this gender-fate. In her denunciation of feminism Didion seems to miss the point: feminism is the politics of human equality, which means economic as well as sexual equality. To deflect the issue onto a matter of language, and the "ambiguities" of language, is perhaps misguided, however esoteric.

In her fiction, which is usually more nuanced than her nonfiction, Didion presents clearly flawed female protagonists like Maria of *Play It as It Lays*, whose masochism allows her to be swinishly exploited by men, and Charlotte Douglas of *A Book of Common Prayer*, who is seduced and misused by her Berkeley English instructor yet

falls in love with him. Maddeningly, Charlotte is incapable of defining herself except by way of accepting a man's domination or as a (failed) mother of a pseudo-revolutionary cliché-spouting daughter (in the mode of Patty Hearst) who sets into motion the actions ending in Charlotte's death. We know that the spoiled daughter, Marin, can only disappoint: "Marin would never bother changing a phrase to suit herself because she perceived the meanings of words only dimly, and without interest." Of the doomed Charlotte the narrator says, with some exasperation: "I think I have never known anyone who led quite so unexamined a life."

The most intensely examined female life in Joan Didion's oeuvre appears to have been her own exhaustively considered interior life; Didion's most brilliantly created fictional character is the writer's persona—"Joan Didion."

In its most entertaining passages *The Last Love Song* is something of a joint biography of Joan Didion and John Gregory Dunne, Didion's writer-husband of nearly forty years, with whom she collaborated on, among other movies, screenplays for *The Panic in Needle Park* (1971), *Play It as It Lays* (1972), and, their most successful film, a remake of *A Star Is Born* with Barbra Streisand (1976). Author of the novels *True Confessions*, *Dutch Shea, Jr.*, *The Red White and Blue*, *Nothing Lost*, and the memoirs *Vegas: A Memoir of a Dark Season* and *Harp*, Dunne was ebulliently outspoken, the acerbic and sometimes scandalous extrovert to Didion's "neurotically inarticulate" introvert.

Here is Didion writing with disarming candor of a stay at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel in Honolulu in the aftermath of an earthquake in the Aleutians: "In the absence of a natural disaster we are left again to our own uneasy devices. We are here on this island in the middle of the Pacific in lieu of filing for divorce." Didion's confiding tone suggests a private diary entry, but it was very publicly printed in 1969 in *The Saturday Evening Post* to be consumed by hundreds of thousands of readers for whom the "confessional" mode was not a commonplace. Not surprisingly, Dunne confides in strangers with startling intimacy as well, in the quasi-autobiographical *Vegas* (1974) with its memorable, Didion-like opening: "In the summer of my nervous breakdown, I went to live in Las Vegas, Clark County, Nevada."

Daugherty quotes Dunne's cool observation: "Sometimes, living with [Didion] was like 'living with [a] piranha.'" Daugherty writes:

Sometimes, at his most depressed, [Dunne] would imagine writing suicide notes, but "whatever minimal impulse I had for suicide was negated by the craft of writing the suicide note. It became a technical problem." He could not stop revising.

"When are you coming home?" [Didion] asked when she called.

A nuanced, nostalgic, and loving portrait of Dunne emerges decades later in *The Year of Magical Thinking*, but Dunne's droll, often raucous voice pervades virtually all of Didion's prose

fiction and gives to certain of her male characters a distinctly comic-aggressive tone in welcome contrast to her repressed, temperamentally inarticulate female characters.

In December 2003 John Gregory Dunne died, of a heart attack, in the couple's Manhattan apartment as abruptly as Jack Lovett dies of a heart attack at the end of *Democracy*. As Inez Victor is a stunned witness to her lover's death so Joan Didion was a witness to her husband's death. In prose eerily forecasting the opening lines of *The Year of Magical Thinking*, the narrator of *Democracy* recounts Lovett's in a swimming pool at a hotel in Jakarta:

It had been quite sudden.

She had watched him swimming toward the shallow end of the pool.

She had reached down to get him a towel.

She had thought at the exact moment of reaching for the towel about the telephone number he had given her, and wondered who would answer if she called it.

And then she had looked up.

Earlier in the novel, her narrator writes: "You see the shards of the novel I am no longer writing, the island, the family, the situation. I lost patience with it. I lost nerve."

Of course, Didion's narrator has not really lost nerve: she has in fact just begun "her" novel. The narrator so intimately addressing us is not Joan Didion and we should not confuse her with the author whose name is on the title

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page of the book though we have been, in the teasing manner of Philip Roth, invited to confuse the two:

Call me the author.

Let the reader be introduced to Joan Didion, upon whose character and doings much will depend of whatever interest these pages may have, as she sits at her writing table in her own room in her own house on Welbeck Street.

And with an air of weary disdain in *The Last Thing He Wanted*, she writes:

The persona of “the writer” does not attract me. As a way of being it has its flat sides. Nor am I comfortable around the literary life: its traditional dramatic line (the romance of solitude, of interior struggle, of the lone seeker after truth) came to seem early on a trying conceit. I lost patience somewhat later with the conventions of the craft, with exposition, with transitions, with the development and revelation of “character.”

Didion uses such authorial intrusions to lend credence to her fictional subjects, as she has often used herself in her nonfiction pieces to lend credence to their authenticity; in this, she is unlike her contemporaries John Barth, Robert Coover, Donald Barthelme, and others associated with the postmodernist literary experimentation of the 1970s and 1980s, who call attention by such devices to the fabrication of “fictional subjects”—in fact, their inauthenticity. But Didion is a social realist and a passionate, one might say old-fashioned moralist: she is too much under the spell of *the real* to wish to debunk it, and she has, unlike some of the postmodernists, exciting and meaningful stories to tell.

Her much-stated anxieties about storytelling—“We tell ourselves stories in order to live.... We live entirely, especially if we are writers, by the imposition of narrative line upon disparate images, by the ‘ideas’ with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience”—seem to spring more from aesthetic considerations than from considerations of truth-telling; the anxieties of Didion’s several fictitious narrators are characteristic of writers seeking something other than conventional forms with which to tell their stories. On the one hand, there is the material (“the island, the family, the situation”), on the other hand the way in which the material will be presented. Ezra Pound set a very high standard with his admonition “Make it new!”—a modernist standard whose significance would not have been lost on any ambitious literary writer coming of age in the 1950s.

Whatever her doubts about the limitations of narrative fiction, Didion seems to have thrown herself into journalism with much enthusiasm, optimism, and unstinting energy—a perfect conjunction of reportorial and memoirist urges. *The Last Love Song* traces in detail the provenance of Didion’s nonfiction pieces, which secured a reputation for her with the publication of *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* in 1968; originally published in such diverse journals as *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Vogue*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Holiday*,

day, and *The American Scholar*, the essays were urged into book form by Henry Robbins, an editor at the time at Farrar, Straus and Giroux who became a personal friend of the Dunnes. (*After Henry*, Didion’s essay collection of 1992, is named for the legendary Robbins, who died of a heart attack, at fifty-one, in 1979.)

It has been Didion’s association with *The New York Review of Books*, however, that seems to have stimulated what was perhaps the most productive phase of her career. Daugherty notes how “as an editor, Robert Silvers intuitively grasped her literary gifts and untapped potential.” Of Didion, Silvers says:

I just thought she was a marvelous observer of American life.... [She is] by no means predictable, by no means an easily classifiable liberal or conservative, she is interested in whether or not people are morally evasive, smug, manipulative, or cruel—those qualities of moral action are very central to all her political work.

Out of Didion’s meticulously researched journalism for *The New York Review* would come several of her most important books—*Salvador* (1983), *Miami* (1987), *After Henry*, *Political Fictions* (2001), and *Where I Was From*; in all, more than forty pieces by Didion would appear in the *Review* over a period of forty years. Among these is the corrosively brilliant “Sentimental Journeys” (1991), an investigation into the media reports surrounding the Central Park jogger rape case of April 1989, which resulted in the convictions, on virtually no forensic evidence, of five young black men who’d been coerced into confessing to white NYPD detectives; Didion’s focus is upon the sensational media coverage of the case, the play of “white” and “black” stereotypes “devised to obscure not only the city’s actual tensions of race and class but also...the civic and commercial arrangements that made those tensions irreconcilable.”

Running so counter to public opinion—that is, white public opinion—Didion’s essay aroused much controversy for its determination to expose, with the precision of a skilled anatomist performing an autopsy, how the mainstream media presents to a credulous public “crimes...understood to be news to the extent that they offer...a story, a lesson, a high concept”—in this case, the specter of a city haunted by predatory black gangs intent on violating white women. (In 2002, Didion’s skepticism about the case would be vindicated when the New York State Supreme Court vacated the convictions of the “Central Park Five” after a reexamination of DNA evidence and the confession of a serial rapist named Matias Reyes.)

Political Fictions is a collection of essays analyzing the ways in which the American political process has become “perilously remote from the electorate it was meant to represent”; in this media-driven process even politicians of integrity are obliged to concoct “fables” about themselves. Didion’s tone

suggests Swiftian indignation modulated by a wry resignation:

There was to writing about politics a certain Sisyphean aspect.... Even that which seemed to be ineluctably clear would again vanish from collective memory, sink traceless into the stream of lapsing news and comment cycles that had become our national River Lethe.

The Last Love Song is not an “authorized” biography and yet it exhibits few of the negative signs of an “unauthorized” biography: it is brimming



Joan Didion, Los Angeles, 1987; photograph by Dominique Nabokov

daughter’s collapse Didion writes in *Blue Nights* with a disconcerting frankness that manages yet to be oblique:

She was depressed. She was anxious. Because she was depressed and because she was anxious she drank too much. This was called medicating herself. Alcohol has its well-known defects as a medication for depression but no one has ever suggested—ask any doctor—that it is not the most effective anti-anxiety agent yet known.

Didion’s early work may be associated with a particular tone, what might be called a higher coolness (“What makes Iago evil? some people ask. I never ask”), and a predilection for establishing herself as a center of consciousness:

It occurred to me during the summer of 1988, in California and Atlanta and New Orleans, in the course of watching first the California primary and then the Democratic and Republican national conventions, that it had not been by accident that the people with whom I had preferred to spend time in high school had, on the whole, hung out in gas stations.

But overall the range of her writerly interests is considerable: from the chic anomie of *Play It As It Lays* to the sharp-eyed sociological reportage of *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* and *The White Album*; from small gems of self-appraisal (“On Keeping a Notebook,” “On Going Home,” “Goodbye to All That”) to the sustained skittishness of *A Book of Common Prayer* and *Democracy*; from the restrained contempt of “In the Realm of the Fisher King” (Reagan’s White House) to the vivid sightings of “Fire Season” (Los Angeles County, 1978); from the powerful evocations of deadly, clandestine politics in *Salvador* to family autobiography with a title precisely chosen to emphasize the past tense, *Where I Was From*, and the more recent memoirs of loss, *The Year of Magical Thinking* and *Blue Nights*.

Who but Joan Didion could frame the stark pessimism of *The Last Thing He Wanted*—with its incantatory reiteration that deal-making, gun-running (in this case, illegally supplying arms to overthrow the Sandinista government in Nicaragua in 1984) is the essential American dream—within a romantic tale of a daughter fulfilling a dying parent’s wish for a “million-dollar score”?

Rare among her contemporaries and, it would seem, against the grain of her own unassertive nature, Didion has forced herself to explore subjects that put her at considerable physical risk, involving travel to the sorts of febrile revolution-prone Central American countries that have figured in her fiction (“Boca Grande,” for instance, of *A Book of Common Prayer*, the purposefully unnamed island of *The Last Thing He Wanted*) and a seeming restlessness with staying in one place for long: “If I have to die, I’d rather die up against a wall someplace.... On the case, yes.” □

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"The Divided States of America": The United States is dividing up into separate liberal, conservative, libertarian and socialist districts.

The only TV network the financially strapped Socialist District had managed so far was a kind of low-budget PBS.... There was cable coverage of endless meetings as the socialists tried to talk their way haltingly toward a classless society. One new socialist show called, "They Didn't Deserve It!" attempted to lay some groundwork for this. The narrator would relate some individual success story. Then a panel of sociologists and psychologists would analyze the combination of factors—looks, character traits (including motivation), mental abilities, family connections, education—that had led to that person's success and then show how all those particular factors could be traced back to other factors—family environment, fetal environment, genetics—over which the person had had no control. The moral of these anti-success narratives was always the same: What we come to be and what we accomplish are in the end "just a matter of luck"; thus, we do not deserve differential rewards as a result. It was heavy stuff—and more than a little depressing.

"The Trainers": An alien race that saved humans from extinction is now raising those humans for food, using the same justifications we use with animals.

What continued to amaze Ambio was the tyranny of the body, the way the pure physicality of the Universe had defeated so many of the dreams that intelligent life forms had conjured up. There'd been human philosophers who—like early Amorphan philosophers—had dreamed of spirit breaking the bonds of the body and evolving into other dimensions. But it was not to be. It was amazing and disappointing the way the appetites and passions of the body remained insistent even in higher life forms, limiting evolution.

It seemed that even an advanced civilization would have to struggle to evolve while dragging the body along like a great weight. Still, who'd have thought that a civilization as far along as the Amorphans would even now want... Well, there was no point in dwelling on it.

Ambio looked out across the gray ocean in the direction from which the freighter would come. Somewhere out there were the green islands where humans still existed, thanks to the intervention of the Amorphans. Human life had been saved. Though, of course, salvation always comes at a price.

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ON ANIMALS AND HUMAN EMBRYOS:

A friend who attended an animal rights conference told me about a woman who was affectionately dubbed "The Chicken Lady" for her crusade on behalf of factory-farmed chickens. One can imagine the Chicken Lady making her pitch to some pro-life people and having the pro-life people think: "Is she nuts? Chickens?! We are talking about human beings!"

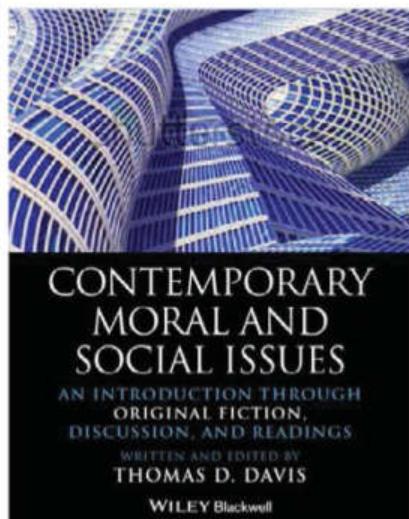
The Chicken Lady might respond indignantly that her chickens, unlike their embryos, have independent lives and can feel pain.

ON ETIQUETTE VERSUS MORALITY:

Rules of etiquette resemble rules of morality in governing human interactions, and some violations of etiquette can result in shame, or at least embarrassment. Certainly there are people to whom etiquette and fashion seem all-consuming. No doubt there are many hosts who would rather have as a guest someone who was convicted of fraud than someone who slurps his soup. However, most of us would agree that our most important moral rules supersede our most important rules of etiquette and fashion.

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The Pope & the Market

William Nordhaus

Laudato Si':
On Care for Our Common Home
an encyclical letter by Pope Francis.
Vatican Press, 184 pp.,
available at w2.vatican.va

Pope Francis's encyclical on the environment and capitalism, *Laudato Si'*, is an eloquent description of the natural world and its relationship to human societies.¹ An appreciation of its poetic and epic qualities is completely absent from secondhand accounts, most of which are devoted to explaining why the pope got it right (about climate science) or wrong (about climate science). In reading the encyclical, one senses the struggle of an ancient institution, immersed in its doctrine and history, slowly and incompletely adapting to modern science. Most commentaries have focused on the pope's endorsement of climate science, but my focus here is primarily on the social sciences, particularly economics.

My major point is that the encyclical overlooks the central part that markets, particularly market-based environmental policies such as carbon pricing, must play if countries are to make substantial progress in slowing global warming.

Laudato Si' is a document that draws on the traditions of the Catholic Church and Catholic doctrine. Its quotations and references are virtually entirely to pronouncements of earlier popes or others in the church hierarchy. There are a few references to secular environmental documents, such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992), as well as to a handful of Catholic philosophers such as Teilhard de Chardin, but no references to any scientific studies. Similarly, there is much discussion about economics, finance, and inequality, but no citations of any data or sources.

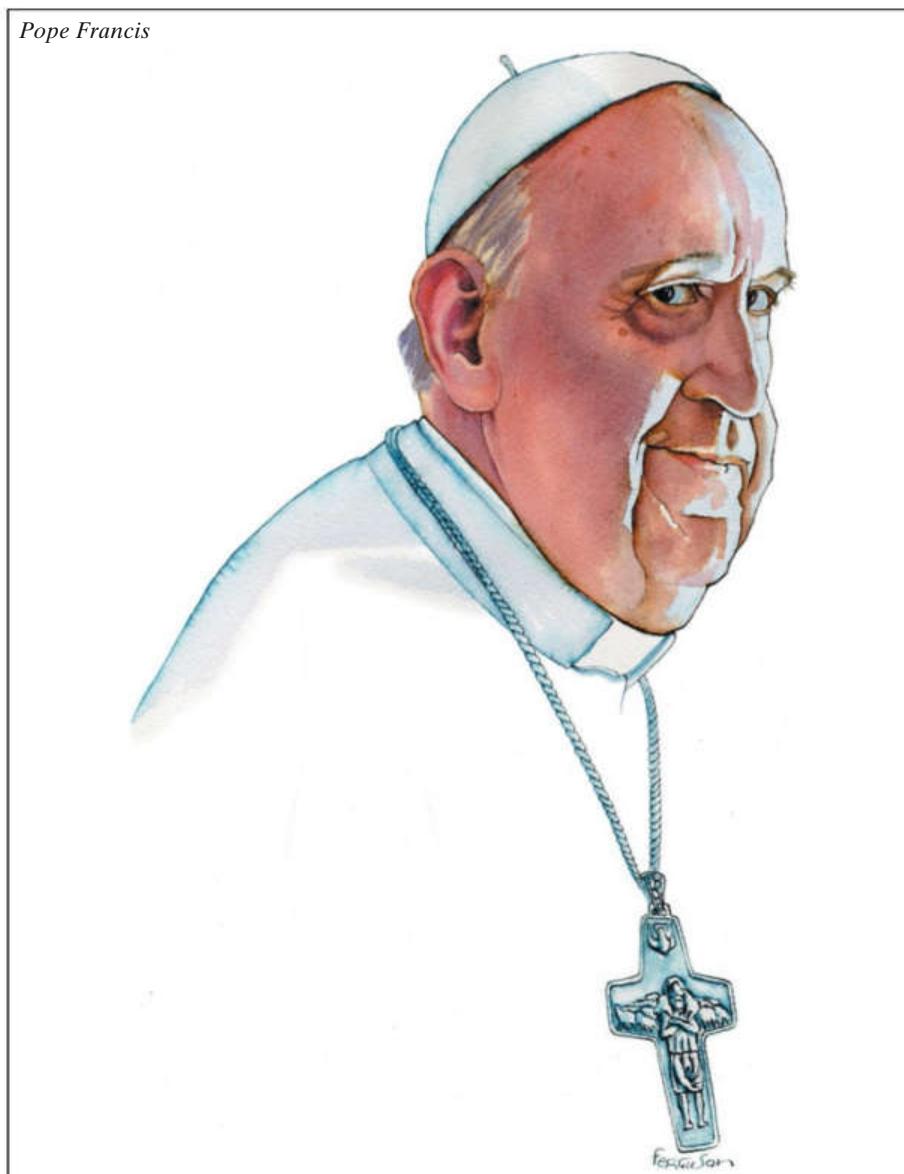
I will not attempt to reconcile the economic doctrines in *Laudato Si'* with earlier statements, such as in *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2004). Rather, I will focus primarily on the economic analysis, starting with its general position toward the goals and means of the globalized market economy, and then discussing the views on environmental economics and policy.

Laudato Si' contains an extensive discussion of the features of markets and modern capitalism. It emphasizes certain dysfunctional tendencies and distortions. For example, there is criticism of excessive consumption:

Since the market tends to promote extreme consumerism in an effort to sell its products, people can easily get caught up in a whirlwind of needless buying and spending. Compulsive consumerism is one example of how the

¹Readers might also refer to a set of essays from a 2014 conference at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, *Sustainable Humanity, Sustainable Nature, Our Responsibility*, edited by Partha S. Dasgupta, Veerabhadran Ramanathan, and Marcelo Sánchez Sordono (Vatican City, 2015), available at www.casinapioiv.va.

Pope Francis



techno-economic paradigm affects individuals. [Paragraph 203]

And of the distorting effect of profits:

Once more, we need to reject a magical conception of the market, which would suggest that problems can be solved simply by an increase in the profits of companies or individuals. Is it realistic to hope that those who are obsessed with maximizing profits will stop to reflect on the environmental damage which they will leave behind for future generations? [Paragraph 190]

Another statement, which argues that profit-seeking is the source of environmental degradation, is this:

The principle of the maximization of profits, frequently isolated from other considerations, reflects a misunderstanding of the very concept of the economy. As long as production is increased, little concern is given to whether it is at the cost of future resources or the health of the environment; as long as the clearing of a forest increases production, no one calculates the losses entailed in the desertification of the land, the harm done to biodiversity or the increased pollution. In a word, businesses profit by calculating and paying only a fraction of the costs involved. [Paragraph 195]

The financiers of the world receive special disapproval:

In the meantime, economic powers continue to justify the current global system where priority tends to be given to speculation and the pursuit of financial gain, which fail to take the context into account, let alone the effects on human dignity and the natural environment.... [Paragraph 56]

This paradigm [consumerism] leads people to believe that they are free as long as they have the supposed freedom to consume. But those really free are the minority who wield economic and financial power. [Paragraph 203]

A mainstream economic account might share many of these views, but it would have a different starting point. Modern economics judges the performance of an economy according to its achievement of three general goals. Does the economy produce efficiently and expand the available quantity and quality of appropriately priced goods and services? Are the resources equitably distributed among different people? And does the economy perform without either high unemployment or ruinous inflation?

In considering the moral aspects of economic activity, the major questions involve the functioning of private market activities. Markets perform the function of coordinating individuals with differing goals and resources through a system of prices, wages, and profits. Compared to other systems, markets have proven a mighty engine of growth in living standards around

the world. The chaos of daily life without smoothly functioning markets was vividly illustrated in July 2015 when Greece's banking system was closed.

Mainstream economics contains one major and paradoxical insight about ethical behavior in a market economy. This insight (first described by Adam Smith in 1776 and later proved by Kenneth Arrow and others about a half-century ago) is that the efficient performance of a market economy does not depend upon the ethics of individual behavior. This is put eloquently in *The Wealth of Nations*:

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.

Trade and exchange tend to benefit both parties. Therefore, most economic activities in a well-regulated market are ethically neutral or positive because they do not harm and may improve the welfare of others. Moreover, from an ethical vantage point, it does not matter whether I buy my meat or beer or bread in a charitable or a foul mood because my actions are transmitted through the impersonal market forces of prices and quantities. What is needed for ethical behavior is to behave as responsible members of the market community: to earn and to pay, but not to steal or to cheat.

The idealized world of Adam Smith ignores two major shortcomings of a realistic market economy. The first is the presence of market failures, such as monopoly or unregulated pollution, that distort market decisions and outcomes, and the second is inequality of opportunities and income.

In his magnificent book on the tradeoff between equality and efficiency, Arthur Okun wrote that he would award two cheers for the market but not three. He referred to the fact, often overlooked by market zealots, that markets contain no automatic mechanisms to guarantee that market outcomes lead to an equitable distribution of income and wealth:

Given the chance, [the market] would sweep away all other values, and establish a vending-machine society. The rights and powers that money should not buy must be protected with detailed regulations and sanctions, and with countervailing aids to those with low incomes. Once those rights are protected and economic deprivation is ended, I believe that our society would be more willing to let the competitive market have its place.²

Pope Francis is clearly deeply concerned about global poverty and the inequalities generated by markets. He argues that resource abuse and exploitation are major contributors to global poverty. Much has been written about rising inequality, particularly in important recent books on the subject by

²Arthur M. Okun, *Equality and Efficiency: The Big Tradeoff* (Brookings Institution, 1975), p. 119.

Anthony Atkinson, Thomas Piketty, and Joseph Stiglitz. However, it would be inaccurate to point to degradation of resources or pollution as major causes of rising poverty. In accounting for the causes of inequality, careful studies of the US by scholars such as David Autor, Claudia Goldin, and Lawrence Katz point, as important causes, to forces such as the labor-saving nature of technological change, rising imports from low- and middle-income countries, and the distortions of the financial system.³

Moreover, while inequality in both income and wealth in the US has risen sharply over the last half-century, trends for the world as a whole have moved in the other direction. Because of rapid growth in low- and middle-income countries, global inequality has been stable or declined slightly in recent years.⁴

Most contemporary economists would argue that Okun gave one cheer too many to the market. They point out that markets can distort incentives and produce inefficient and potentially dangerous “free-market” outcomes. So far as the environment is concerned, the most important market failure is called an externality. This is the term for by-products of economic activity—such as pollution—that cause damages to innocent bystanders. These externalities occur because those who pollute do not pay for that privilege, and those who are harmed are not compensated.

Laudato Si' has an eloquent discussion of many local, national, and global environmental problems. The discussion of biodiversity is particularly insightful. It points to the fact that many popular analyses incorrectly look primarily to the market value of lost species (such as the stock market value of some potential miracle drug lurking on a tropical tree) and ignore their intrinsic value (Paragraphs 32–42). But the discussion of solutions in *Laudato Si'* provides little guidance on effective policies. The encyclical points out the need to replace fossil fuels with renewable energy and conservation. It also acknowledges that this will be expensive. But who will develop the new energy technologies that will replace fossil fuels? And, more important, why would people use more expensive fuels when cheap fossil fuels are available?

The encyclical states that the advances in slowing climate change have been regrettably few. There is a lack of

“honesty, courage and responsibility.” Progress has been slow because countries have shown “failure of conscience and responsibility” (Paragraph 169).

But the growing peril of climate change and many other environmental problems arises primarily not from unethical individual behavior such as consumerism or cowardice, bad conscience or excessive profiteering. Rather, environmental degradation is the result of distorted market signals that put too low a price on harmful environmental effects.

Putting a low price on valuable environmental resources is a phenomenon that pervades modern society. Agricultural water is not scarce in California; it is underpriced. Flights are stacked up on runways because takeoffs and landings are underpriced. People wait for hours in traffic jams because road

consumption of some countries and sectors. [Paragraph 171]

The target of the pope’s criticism is unclear. The term “carbon credits” is not a term of art in environmental policy. The Spanish version (from which the criticism may originate) refers to “bonos de carbono,” which are certified emissions reductions under the Kyoto Protocol.⁵ Many commentators have interpreted this passage as a condemnation of cap-and-trade, the most widely used system of limiting market-based emissions today. Whatever the specific target, this part of the encyclical is clearly a critique of market-based environmental approaches.

Because market-based environmental policies are so central, it will be useful to describe how they work. As



Pope Francis with Ecuador's President Rafael Correa in Quito at the start of his recent tour of South America, July 2015

sector would emit one million tons of carbon dioxide. Next assume that the country decides to limit the total emissions of all these companies to one million tons, and it auctions the permits on a special environmental market.

The biotech companies, we can assume, have much higher economic value per unit of emissions, so they outbid the power plants. The auction price might be \$25 per ton of carbon, which would be the market price of carbon and indicates the cost of reducing emissions by one ton. At that price, the power plants would find it unprofitable to continue using fossil fuels, while the biotech companies would emit one million tons and still earn a neat profit. The power plants would use nonfossil fuels or shut down, and total emissions would then be limited to one million tons.

So the high carbon price serves two functions. It serves as an economic incentive to stop emissions and at the limiting price will accomplish the desired reductions of emissions. But just as important is that it ensures that the scarce and valuable emissions permits are used by firms who can squeeze out the highest economic value per ton of emissions.

Additionally, the carbon price is an indicator of how much emissions should be reduced. A high price signals large required reductions, a low price requires smaller reductions, and a zero price (as in most countries today) signals that there need be no reductions. Ensuring a high price on carbon emissions is the single most important tool for slowing emissions.

Cap-and-trade has in fact been successfully used, for example to phase out lead from gasoline, to limit sulfur dioxide emissions in the United States by more than half, and to limit carbon dioxide emissions both in the European Union and more recently in major Chinese municipalities. The alternative to cap-and-trade is carbon taxation, which raises carbon prices by taxing carbon emissions. Such a tax is simpler and avoids any of the potential corruption, market volatility, and distributional issues that might arise with cap-and-trade systems.

Given the successes of cap-and-trade and other market mechanisms to improve the environment, it is unfortunate that they are the target of Pope Francis’s criticism. Permits for emissions are traded like other financial assets, and indeed they are often highly volatile; but there is no evidence that they are the favored instrument of financial speculators. Rather, they are volatile because future economic conditions (such as electricity demand or natural gas prices) are uncertain.

Perhaps no one will attend to Pope Francis’s attack on trade in permits and implicitly on carbon pricing. Perhaps his endorsement of climate science and the reality of warming and environmental damage will be effective in turning the tide toward strong actions.

But he has missed a unique opportunity to endorse one of the two crucial elements of an effective strategy for slowing climate change. He does indeed acknowledge the soundness of the science and the reality of global warming. It is unfortunate that he does not endorse a market-based solution, particularly carbon pricing, as the only practical policy tool we have to bend down the dangerous curves of climate change and the damages they cause. □

³Anthony B. Atkinson, *Inequality: What Can Be Done?* (Harvard University Press, 2015); Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-first Century* (Harvard University Press, 2014); Joseph E. Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future* (Norton, 2012); David H. Autor, “Polanyi’s Paradox and the Shape of Employment Growth,” proceedings of a conference of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, “Re-Evaluating Labor Market Dynamics,” August 2014, available at www.kansascityfed.org; Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz, *The Race Between Education and Technology* (Harvard University Press, 2008).

⁴Branko Milanovic, *Worlds Apart: Measuring International and Global Inequality* (Princeton University Press, 2005); Branko Milanovic, “Global Income Inequality by the Numbers: In History and Now: An Overview,” *Global Policy*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (May 2013).

use is unpriced. People die premature deaths from small sulfur particles in the air because air pollution is underpriced. And the most perilous of all environmental problems, climate change, is taking place because virtually every country puts a price of zero on carbon dioxide emissions.

To understand environmental problems today—whether local ones like congestion or national ones like air pollution or global ones like global warming—requires understanding markets. Markets can work miracles when they work properly, but that power can be subverted and do the economic equivalent of the devil’s work when price signals are distorted. For climate change, the major need is to raise the price of CO₂ emissions sufficiently high that they are reduced sharply. This can be done either by taxing emissions or by a system of cap-and-trade.

Unfortunately, *Laudato Si'* does not recognize the fact that environmental problems are caused by market distortions rather than by markets per se. This is seen in the condemnation of “carbon credits”:

The strategy of buying and selling “carbon credits” can lead to a new form of speculation which would not help reduce the emission of polluting gases worldwide. This system seems to provide a quick and easy solution under the guise of a certain commitment to the environment, but in no way does it allow for the radical change which present circumstances require. Rather, it may simply become a ploy which permits maintaining the excessive

with other environmental externalities, appropriate pricing is a central mechanism for reducing carbon dioxide emissions and slowing climate change. There are two market mechanisms by which countries can raise the price of emissions in order to reduce them: cap-and-trade and carbon taxes. I will focus on cap-and-trade because that is a system of buying and selling of credits that the encyclical criticizes.

How does cap-and-trade work and why is it effective? Cap-and-trade begins with actions by which a country, through its government, caps or limits its carbon dioxide emissions. The country then auctions or issues a limited number of “emissions permits.” These convey the right to emit a given quantity of emissions. Firms that own the permits can use them or sell them on carbon markets, while firms who need them can purchase permits. The advantage of establishing a market in permits is that it ensures that emissions are used in the most productive manner.

Here is a hypothetical example. Suppose that there are two types of firms, power plants and biotech companies. Both would be profitable in a world with no emissions limits, and each

⁵The Kyoto Protocol allows emission-reduction projects in developing countries such as renewable power to earn certified emission reduction (CER) credits. These CERs can be traded and sold, and used by industrialized countries to meet a part of their emission reduction targets under the Kyoto Protocol.

Video Games: The Secret Life

Gabriel Winslow-Yost

Gamelife: A Memoir

by Michael W. Clune.
Farrar, Straus and Giroux,
211 pp., \$25.00

God in the Machine: Video Games as Spiritual Pursuit

by Liel Leibovitz.
Templeton, 144 pp.,
\$19.95; \$14.95 (paper)

1.

The slightly ungainly title of Michael Clune's new book, *Gamelife*, gives an indication of what an unusual cross-breed it is: at once an affecting memoir of a lonely midwestern childhood in the 1980s and an argumentative essay on how video games work and what they can mean. It is brief and passionate, driven by the conviction that its subject matter is both essential and too often overlooked. "When it comes to probing questions about their intimate life as computer-game players," he writes near the end, in what amounts to a kind of backdoor manifesto, "most people don't have much to say.... Society has convinced them that computer games are a trivial pastime and there's no reason to think about them."

The crucial word there is "intimate." Video games have become immensely popular and lucrative—155 million Americans play them, according to the Entertainment Software Association (ESA), spending over \$22 billion a year, as compared to \$10.4 billion on movie tickets—and are often written about as a business phenomenon or societal issue. But they are of course not experienced in anything like those terms; they intertwine with the daily lives of those who play them in all sorts of ways. A commuter may poke through a few minutes of the puzzle game *Candy Crush Saga* on her cell phone every evening after work, idly shifting a random assortment of colored shapes into matching lines with her mind still half on the workday. A teenager may play *Bloodborne* on a console all night in her room, entirely absorbed in its complex simulated combat and dreamlike environments.

Clune's book shows just how intense and intimate an engagement with video games can be. The book's structure equates the passage of time with the passage from game to game—seven chapters cover both seven games and seven years of his life, from *Suspended* (1983), a text-only adventure Clune plays as a seven-year-old, to *Might and Magic II* (1988), a fantasy role-playing game with 3-D graphics in which he takes refuge at thirteen, during the final months of middle school. The events of these years—friendships made and betrayed, conflicts with teachers and schoolmates, the divorce of his parents, a move from one suburb of Chicago to another—are mostly familiar in kind; but as Clune describes them, the games let him burrow beneath, to depict the fraught, ever-changing mental life that underlies these childhood incidents, all the time spent alone, staring inward, becoming himself.

Games, then, here take the part often taken by books in other memoirs of

childhood, providing the first, decisive encounters with adult solitude, and an adult's unanswerable questions. It was from video games, Clune writes, that he learned "about the big things"; games "teach us about death, about character, about fate, about action and identity."

In a way, it is surprising there haven't been more books that do this, more hybrid memoirs of games and life. Writing about video games almost always tends toward memoir, if only implicitly. Games are consumed actively in a way that is very different from encounters with books, movies, or other art forms: by definition, one's time with a game

caine.... Playing *GTA IV* on coke for weeks and then months at a time, I learned that maybe all a game can do is point at the person who is playing it, and maybe this has to be enough.

This Gaming Life: Travels in Three Cities (2008), by the British video game critic Jim Rossignol, begins with the slightly harrowing story of how he became a professional reviewer: consumed with playing *Quake III*—one of the purest examples of a type of game called a first-person shooter, with simulated gunplay seen down the gun sights

tual device for separating action from ego," Clune explains. "Freeing movement from the narrow prison of character." He wanders his neighborhood for hours as darkness falls, lost in a reverie of the whole world as an immense, fantastical "map scroll[ing] beneath" his feet, terribly late for dinner, before getting picked up by the cops and brought back to his irate mother.

A brief conversation early in the book between Clune and a visiting cousin combines the daft quasi logic of childhood inquiry and the inevitability of a dream, all spoken in the language of games:



A screenshot from *Might and Magic II: Gates to Another World* (1988), one of the computer games Michael Clune writes about in *Gamelife: A Memoir*

is time spent taking actions, making decisions; and video games generally require a long time to play—dozens, even hundreds of hours, spread out over weeks or months. All this means that an account of playing a video game inevitably involves a recollection of a portion of one's own life, including a few of one's own successes and failures, decisions and regrets (though the actions and results of the game are simulated, the choices, and the emotions they inspire, are not). Memories of a game and of the life led around it often bleed into each other.

Many of the best recent books about video games have a tendency to break suddenly into autobiography. A chapter in Tom Bissell's *Extra Lives: Why Video Games Matter* (2010) is about *Grand Theft Auto IV*, a sprawling action game set in a vast, fictionalized simulation of New York (other entries in the series portray Los Angeles, Miami, and London), which Bissell says may be "the most colossal creative achievement of the last twenty-five years." But it also tells the story of his cocaine habit:

The game was faster and more beautiful while I was on co-

of the combatant you control—he is fired from his job as a financial journalist. "I felt the rush of sudden freedom: now there was nothing between me and pure indulgence. I could concentrate on [Quake III] seven days a week, without interruption."

But Clune's *Gamelife* is the only book I've seen that sustains this double focus for more than a few pages. Much of the book moves in counterpoint, alternating in short subchapters between exterior and interior, life and game, letting the two halves of Clune's experience jostle against each other in unexpected ways. He writes of his first encounter with the 1983 game *Ultima III: Exodus*, a fantasy role-playing game in which the player controls several characters through an elaborate, complexly simulated fictional world (such games, descended from *Dungeons and Dragons*, tend to feature a lot of conversations, and a lot of numbers).

In *Ultima III*, the player's "character was represented by a small blinking humanoid figure at the center" of "a flat map...a thing of unthinkable complexity...swiss-cheesed with dungeons and castles and cities." The game leads eleven-year-old Clune to a kind of pixelated Zen state. "The map-based computer role-playing game is a spiri-

"How many times can you die?" I asked James.

"Three," he said. "You mean in *Pac-Man*?"

"No, in life," I said.

"Oh," he said. He thought. "I don't think you can die too many times..."

"In *Suspended* I die every day," I whispered....

"Look, Michael," he said. "If ya had to venture a guess about how many fuckin' times you can die in fuckin' *Suspended*, what would you say?"...

"If I had to guess," I said.... "One trillion times."

He seemed impressed. He looked down at his feet, the way he did when he was thinking about something secret.

The idea of death, and of the representation of death, permeates the book. Video games, of course, depict death constantly, and always inadequately; death in a video game is in many ways the exact opposite of actual death: temporary, repeatable, in most senses meaningless, since a character is reborn immediately after he "dies," and in any case doesn't exist. But for Clune that very inadequacy, that easy,

endless recurrence, allows a glimpse of the real thing, in all its devastating indifference.

Chapter five, for instance, begins by announcing his parents' divorce: "One day in June [my father] was standing in the sun, smiling uncertainly...and the next day he was gone." A few pages later, the chapter turns to *Elite* (1984), in which the player pilots a simulated spaceship, engaging in both combat and more mundane tasks like trade and asteroid-mining. Young Clune loves the game, but finds himself completely unable to dock his ship at one of the game's rotating space stations, an infamously difficult feat of hand-eye coordination; each time he attempts this basic, incongruously difficult task, he crashes, his ship explodes, and he, as the pilot, dies. But he keeps trying:

the illusion of solid three-dimensional objects"). Video games, from most perspectives, are an asinine art form, a matter of pressing a few buttons in the right way, at the right time, when presented with the right little pattern of lights. The player exists in a world, as Clune writes elsewhere in his book, that contains only "three feelings: VICTORY, DEFEAT, and FRUSTRATION." How could a game possibly matter so much?

Liel Leibovitz, a professor at NYU who teaches classes on video games and cofounded the NYU Faculty Council on Games, asks much the same question at the beginning of *God in the Machine: Video Games as Spiritual Pursuit*. A parent watching a child play a video game, he writes, sees a "rapid twitching of thumbs, hear[s] the cacophony of explosions and howls and

games that allows that discovery, that lets them, through sheer brute force, approach the most obscure parts of the world and ourselves—"death... character... fate... action... identity." "Computer games," he writes,

know that something that happens only once doesn't mean much to humans. Once-in-a-lifetime events tend to bound off us.... Something that happens ten thousand times? It penetrates our innermost layer. It becomes part of us.

And that's how computer games work. Everything that happens in a computer game happens ten thousand times.... They turn insights into habits.

Some part of this disagreement may be simple chronology—Clune is writ-

ing the game gives for the tasks it sets for the player (the kidnapped princess is on the other side of the platforms, the aliens are invading Earth), what matters is that the tasks are assigned, that they can be completed, and that the player is told whether or not she has completed them successfully—if you navigate the platforms, you continue to the next level; if you don't, Mario falls in the lava and is killed, and you start over. Playing becomes a constant cycle of certainty: task, result, task, result, on and on until the game is abandoned.

The result is that, no matter what they are ostensibly about, video games can only have one real message to communicate, one satisfaction to give: themselves, the singular experience of submitting to a video game. "The designer," Leibovitz writes,

through the game, teaches us that the true joy is the joy of learning, of our own free will, to love the game and the designer above all, to abandon all other ways of being in the world, all other claims on subjectivity or agency, and instead embrace the true happiness that comes with understanding one's place in the world.

For some, this dynamic of submission and limitation is what makes video games inferior to other art forms, or even dangerous. The anthropologist David Graeber, for instance, warns in his recent *The Utopia of Rules* (2015) that "computer games...turn fantasy into an almost entirely bureaucratic procedure" and "reinforce the sense that we live in a universe where accounting procedures define the very fabric of reality." Leibovitz agrees that games present "a universe closely governed by rules," but sees that as entirely to the good; the video-game universe is a "haven" from the "irresolvable anxieties" of contemporary life.

Indeed, by offering a voluntary, temporary experience of guidance, of certainty—of purpose, however arbitrary—video games, for Leibovitz, demonstrate "innate theological sensibilities." Rather than being driven by boredom, or bureaucratic routine, or—as the most alarmist critics have claimed over the years—bloodlust, "video game players are guided by grace." Indeed, video games are "like religion," and playing them is like going to church, or even praying: "Video games...are closer in spirit to ritual than they are to any other human pursuit."

Many readers will, I think, find this preposterous. All sorts of objections spring to mind: playing a video game lacks the hushed respectfulness of religious ritual (the goal is to *beat* the game, after all); the player, unlike the worshiper, doesn't really take anything on faith; and so on. But Leibovitz has at the very least pointed to one of the fundamental paradoxes of his subject. Beneath the competitiveness, aggression, frustration, even outright fear and rage that playing video games can inspire, they do seem to offer some genuine solace. It doesn't strike me as a coincidence that both Clune and Bissell associated video games with taking drugs, or that both writers continued



A gunfight in *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, one of the video games owned by Adam Lanza, who committed the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, in December 2012

I smashed myself to bits on... space stations again and again and again.... Ten times a half hour. Twenty times an hour. In especially intense periods of play, I had the uncanny experience of seeing through my death every three minutes for two full hours.

The end of the chapter jumps forward ten years. Clune, now in his twenties, addicted to heroin (the subject of his previous memoir, *White Out: The Secret Life of Heroin*), overdoses in a hotel in Amsterdam. "The bag of white powder dropped from my fingers, I fell back on the bed.... And when the stars came through the transparent hotel room walls, I recognized the feeling. I recognized it from *Elite*."

2.

Why, on the verge of death, would someone remember a game played—poorly—a decade earlier? A game, furthermore, with no real story, without sound (in the version Clune played), with simplistic "wireframe" graphics in which every object is a white, transparent polygon ("eighties PCs weren't powerful enough to generate

shrieks," all at "a rhythm much too fast to allow rational thought," and wonders: "What, after all, is the satisfaction of furiously pressing all these buttons without pause or reprieve?"

The answer, for both Clune and Leibovitz, is precisely that absence of reprieve. For Leibovitz, "the logic of video game play is that of repetition." The player, twitching away, advancing from one setting and series of tasks to another, all-but-identical setting and series of tasks, is "in perpetual movement and yet perpetually stuck." Leibovitz's book is brief but wildly ambitious, studded with references unexpected in writing on this subject; here he brings in Kierkegaard, who wrote that "the only happy love" is offered by repetition. It is this happiness that Leibovitz argues the video-gamer finds, and he quotes Kierkegaard at length: "It does not have the restlessness of hope, the uneasy adventurousness of discovery, but neither does it have the sadness of recollection—it has the blissful security of the moment."

Clune, on the other hand, has argued throughout his book that "the uneasy adventurousness of discovery" is exactly what he found in video games. And it is nothing other than the repetitiousness of the actions of the

ing of a child's experiences with games; Leibovitz writes as an adult still fascinated by them. The same game will be very different for a wide-eyed ten-year-old burning through summer vacation and a thirty-five-year-old (the average age of a gamer, the ESA claims) unwinding after work; it isn't hard to imagine the former finding all sorts of novelties where the latter sees only "blissful security."

But the differences go much deeper than this. For Leibovitz, the defining feature of the video game experience is not exploration, but limitation. Video games offer a drastically curtailed version of life, "the world...reduced to a singular and comprehensible task." The player is given a handful of buttons on a controller, or a computer's mouse and keyboard, and told exactly what to do with them. Some games literally instruct the player to press a specific button at a specific time; most are at least a little more involved, embedding the instructions in a fictional, simulated world—saying, in effect, "Make the character jump across those platforms, using these four buttons," or, "Use the mouse to aim the animated gun at the aliens, and click to shoot."

Regardless of the specifics, and regardless of the larger fictional justifica-

to play long after they stopped using them.

In fact, the final pages of *Gamelife* are surprisingly congruent with Leibovitz's argument. It is 1989, and Clune is a few weeks from graduating from middle school. He has been suddenly and mysteriously ostracized by all his friends and classmates, has become almost literally "invisible," someone "*the others won't look at*." He spends his free time pondering his isolation and playing *Might and Magic II*, a game of exploration, puzzle-solving, and combat set in a fantasy world. It is "full of the usual unicorns, goblins, and demons"—typical in fantasy games—but there is one aspect of it that is "genuinely new. It showed a 3-D view of the world." Though other games "had attempted something similar," only "*Might and Magic II*, with its sophisticated modeling of perspective and shading effects...incorporated an element of reality."

Thirteen-year-old Clune is entranced, and disconcerted. "This 3-D," he thinks, "it has something, something...effervescent." ("I'd heard the word on a commercial for a new soda," he interjects as an adult.) And then he realizes what it is: "Anywhere you went...you could always see the sky." The sky in *Might and Magic II* is bright blue, with just the right scattering of puffy white clouds, and the game's "weirdly low walls" meant that the sky is never blocked from view. As Clune observes, such a clean, lulling sky was "easy for even the relatively primitive graphics of late-eighties computer games to represent" because "the sky, as everyone knows, is the least realistic element of the real world." From the Vikings, who "believed it to be the blue skull of a giant," to medieval Christians, who "saw it as the veil of heaven," to a miserable teenager spending his days alone, "it has always been easy for humans to believe the most fantastical things about the sky. To look up at the sky in the middle of a busy street is to be somewhere else."

Alone yet again at recess, Clune finds himself "invisible, looking up at the sky." He thinks about *Might and Magic II*, and he thinks about his absent father—and here he circles unexpectedly, obliquely, in Leibovitz's direction:

I remembered driving with my father, I must have been six or seven.... Looking through the car window at the blue sky. What was blue color outside was a quiet feeling inside me and I thought: I will stay like this forever. Peace, I thought. Like they say in church. Peace....

That sky, the sky of the May of my thirteenth year, was the most beautiful sky I've ever seen.... The magic sky.... It's not easy to talk to yourself. To stand under the circular sky of your interior.... You need a code...something that's not yours. A ruler to measure everything that is. A fixed point. A horizon for your inner sky.

In any other book, you'd guess such a rhapsody was about faith, or a great love, or the ideals of a revolution. But in Clune's, it's about video games—seven, quite specifically. He names them; "I stack them, one on top of the other.... When I die, I will remember the color of the sky."

3.

I remember that feeling, too, though my games were different—*Fallout* instead of *Might and Magic II*, *Half-Life* instead of *Wolfenstein*, *Planescape: Torment* instead of *Ultima III*; not that the specifics really matter. And I remember coming back to that feeling, that sky-blue, simulated peace, a few times before I read Clune's memoir. Once was when I first saw Cory Arcangel's 2002 installation *Super Mario Clouds*, currently on view at the Whitney Museum: a copy of the old Nintendo game *Super Mario Brothers*, projected on the wall, manually rewired to remove every visual aspect of the game except its flat blue background and the white, pixelated clouds that slowly drift across, right to left, forever. Another was last year, when I read the Connecticut state attorney's report on the killings at Sandy Hook Elementary, and a number of the related police reports on the murderer, Adam Lanza.

On one of Lanza's hard drives, I learned, there was a folder labeled "Fun." It contained, according to the reports, "images of [Lanza] holding a handgun to his head," "images of [Lanza] holding a rifle to his head," a "5 second video titled 'postal' depicting children being shot (dramatization)"—and several recordings of Lanza playing video games.

To many, the meaning of all this was obvious. In the months following Lanza's horrific crimes, a great deal was written about his life as a video game player. He was, we were told, "enthralled by blood-splattering, shoot-'em-up electronic games." He played alone for hours in his "eerie lair," a "windowless bunker." "He may have been copying a video game" when he killed. He was "motivated by violent video games." According to an anonymous "tough career cop" quoted in the New York *Daily News*, the Newtown massacre

was the work of a video gamer...a violent, insane gamer. It was like porn to a rapist. They feed on it until they go out and say, enough of the video screen. Now I'm actually going to be a hunter.

Lanza did indeed own a number of violent games: entries in the militaristic *Call of Duty* series, the frenetic zombie-slaughtering games *Left 4 Dead* and *Dead Rising*, the anarchic *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*. He apparently spent hours with *Combat Arms*, an online first-person shooter that can be played for free. But the game that shows up the most in the reports, the game he seems to have played with a peculiar, unnerving intensity, isn't violent at all.

As far as one can tell from the police reports, Adam Lanza's favorite video game was *Dance Dance Revolution*. The wildly popular *DDR* series, first released in the US in 1999, with dozens of sequels since, is bright, rhythmic, cheerful, and overwhelmingly repetitive. The player stands on a raised platform with four large buttons on it, arranged in a cross; a song plays and the player presses the buttons with his feet, in time to the music and according to the instructions on the screen in front of him, moving his feet so they match the screen displays. Success is

pressing the right button at precisely the right time, over and over, often at very high speed.

This is the game Lanza is seen playing in the videos stored on his hard drive. (It isn't clear if the videos were taken by Lanza or someone else; a brief handheld clip, supposedly of Lanza playing, has surfaced online, but its giggling cameraman is standing some distance behind the player, whose face cannot be seen.) He would drive to a movie theater in Danbury, Connecticut, about fifteen minutes away from his house, and play the *DDR* machine it had in its lobby; it isn't specified in any of the reports, but it seems to have been the eighth iteration, 2002's *Dance Dance Revolution EXTREME*.



Steve McCurry/Magnum Photos

A man playing a Dance Dance Revolution game, similar to the one Adam Lanza played, Tokyo, 2008

He would "only come to the theatre to play *DDR*," according to the reports, and came so often (and was so reticent about his name) that he became known to the employees as "DDR Boy."

At first—in the months around April 2011—he would sometimes come with a friend, who might go to a movie and then come back out to play with him; the machine had two sets of controls, allowing simultaneous play. Sometimes he would play with one of the theater's employees. During this period Lanza "would come to the theatre every Friday thru Sunday...playing for about 4 hours" per day. "He would play the game so much that he would sweat profusely."

In August 2011, he started playing for eight to ten hours a day. He stopped coming for a month, then returned—but now always alone. In August or September 2012, one of the theater employees, who used to play with Lanza, and was one of the few to whom he eventually told his first name, noticed that Lanza was "more distant than he normally was." Lanza became sweaty from playing, and went to the restroom to dry off. When he came back, the employee "approached him and ask him if he was ok." Lanza answered "that he didn't have any money and also stated 'I just don't want to go home now.'" Lanza's right sleeve was rolled up a little, allowing the employee a glimpse of "a large circular welt...on his forearm. After noticing that, he offered [Lanza] twenty dollars

to play the game, which he accepted." When the employee left for the night, Lanza was still playing. His manager told him the next day that he had had to unplug the machine in order to get Lanza to leave, "which he did without incident."

This was the last time that the employee had contact with Lanza. Another person working at the same theater told the police that Lanza was last seen there "sometime in November about a month before the shooting."

It is all but impossible to see any aspect of Lanza's life clearly through the haze of thirdhand testimony, broken hard drives, redactions, and cop-speak summaries, his mental illness and fixations on the military and on previous mass shootings, and the sheer overwhelming horror of his crimes. His time with *DDR* was unusual because of its intensity but also because it was public; most of his video game playing, like most of his life, is invisible to us. We don't know what he was doing during his month-long hiatus from the game (we do know it began with "a large snowstorm"). We can't see everything else he was playing, or how he was playing it.

We do know that he played some violent games, but we don't know how often—one acquaintance interviewed by the police "believed Adam played many violent/shooting type games," another that he spent "the majority of his time playing non-violent video games all day." And there is nothing even close to a consensus about the effects that playing violent games may or may not have. In 2005, and again this August, the American Psychological Association declared that "violent video game play is linked to increased aggression in players," though not yet "to criminal violence or delinquency." Some two hundred scientists and professors signed an open letter objecting to the APA's report as "misleading and alarmist" (Leibovitz, for his part, calls the connection between real and video game violence a "thoroughly refuted canard").

Still, what I think I see—what I recognized, or thought I recognized, when I read these accounts of one small part of his existence—is not the "porn to a rapist" that unnerved so many. It is, instead, a distant, awful version of the story Clune tells in *Gamelife*, and of the experience Leibovitz tries to explain in *God in the Machine*, and of the times in my own life and in the lives of many of my friends when we've played some video game as long as we possibly could, for one reason or another.

Descriptions of video games, especially ones aimed at people who don't play, tend to focus on what the game is "about," on the setting and events it depicts, as if it were a novel or a film. But the experience of playing a game grows and shifts, gaining implications and intensities as it meets the mind of each player. I spent months, for instance, playing *Grand Theft Auto V* (sequel to the game that consumed Tom Bisell and to several of the games Lanza owned) when it came out two years ago. It is violent and as sneeringly misanthropic as its predecessors, and yet my memories of it are peaceful, even meditative, its glittering, anarchic simulation of Los Angeles like the world seen from the window of a car, distant and safe.

‘The Return of Foxy Grandpa’

T. S. Eliot

We publish here for the first time T.S. Eliot's review of two books by the English mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947). The following headnote, textual note, and footnotes are by Frances Dickey, Jennifer Formichelli, and Ronald Schuchard, coeditors of Literature, Politics, Belief, 1927–1929, volume 3 of the forthcoming eight-volume edition of The Complete Prose of T.S. Eliot: The Critical Edition, in which all essays will appear with scholarly annotation and apparatus. The first two volumes (1905–1926) were published online in September 2014; volumes 3 and 4, English Lion, 1930–1933, edited by Jason Harding and Ronald Schuchard, will be published this fall on Project MUSE by Johns Hopkins University Press and Faber and Faber.

—The Editors

“The Return of Foxy Grandpa,” T.S. Eliot’s unpublished review of Alfred North Whitehead’s successive Lowell Lectures at Harvard, *Science and the Modern World* (Macmillan, 1925) and *Religion in the Making* (Macmillan, 1926), was set in type for *The Enemy*, edited by Wyndham Lewis, for publication in the third issue, March 1927 (see textual note at end). *Foxy Grandpa* was the title character of a popular American newspaper comic strip (1900–1918), in which Grandpa consistently outwitted his two trickster grandsons.

Professor Whitehead’s two recent books, *Science and the Modern World* and *Religion in the Making*, have been received with acclamation.¹ Indeed they deserve it; Dr. Whitehead has a power of lucid exposition of the most difficult subjects, great historical knowledge and ability to generalise his knowledge. He has a rare and remarkable combination of ability. It is remarkable that so eminent a mathematician and physicist should also have an historical mind. It

¹Herbert Read reviewed *Science and the Modern World* in *The Criterion* of June 1926, declaring it “the most important book published in the conjoint realms of science and philosophy since Descartes’ *Discourse on Method*”; his review of *Religion in the Making*, which “begins with the concepts of modern science and seeks to deduce from them the nature of a godhead,” appeared in *The Criterion* of May 1927.

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would be still more remarkable to find that he had, in addition, a theological mind. His books have been received with jubilation by liberal Christians, and with great annoyance by atheists. But before we allow ourselves to be gratified or vexed, as the case may be, by Dr. Whitehead’s rehabilitation of religion, it might be well to enquire what sort of religion his writings are likely to further, and whether that sort is intrinsically valuable. It is a matter

with a tremendous machinery of comparative anatomy, evolves a Deity who is merely a celestial captain of industry.⁴ The disproportion between the elaborateness of the equipment and the mediocrity of the product is still more impressive in the work of Professor Whitehead. In every case the Father Christmas turns out to be merely our Sunday school superintendent in disguise.

We might take warning at the outset

from Whitehead’s use of the term “religion.” He says “The conflict between religion and science is what naturally occurs to our minds when we think of this subject.”⁵ This hoary old notion must have done duty, clothed in practically the same words, in score upon score of sermons in the last seventy-five years. Whether there is such a thing as “science” above the various sciences, is a question which I should not venture to contest with Professor Whitehead; but that there is such a thing as “religion” above the various particular religions, seems to me very doubtful.

For the anthropologist, the student occupied with the “history of religions,” the term “religion” is perfectly valid. It is not sufficiently understood—though it is

simple enough—that the point of view of the anthropologist and of the theologian are quite different. They are not opposed: they are merely different; as different, and no more opposed, than the appearance of a house to someone who is inside and to someone who is outside it. The anthropologist is concerned with what has been believed; the theologian is concerned with what is true. So far as you are an anthropologist, you are not, in your professional capacity, the “believer” of any religion; you are occupied only with the phenomena of all.

On the other hand, so far as you are the “believer” of any religion, then “religion” no longer exists for you, or the contrast between “religion and science”; you are concerned only with “conflicts” in the sense of conflicts between particular tenets of your religion and particular theories of science. The sincere Christian, or the sincere Moslem, or the sincere Buddhist, is quite unconcerned with conflicts be-

which all earnest atheists and Christians should take to heart.

Dr. Whitehead belongs to a generation which may be said to include within its limits elder statesmen such as the late William James, and younger statesmen such as Mr. Wells and Mr. Russell. Many of the eminent men of that generation conceal the tender heart of sentiment behind the brilliant emblems of authority. Mr. Shaw, after all his pamphlets, his economics, his Fabianism and mild ferocity, had no better vision to offer us than the earthly paradise of *Back to Methuselah*, to be staged by perspiring pupils of Miss Margaret Morris.² Mr. Russell’s lonely Prometheus of thought, the undaunted hero of Liberalism, flourishes smirkingly the instruments of contraception in the faces of the clergy.³ Mr. Wells,

²Eliot criticized the “creative evolution” of Shaw’s *Back to Methuselah* in his “London Letter” of September 1921, together with the dancing school of Margaret Morris, eleven of whose pupils staged the “dance of youths and maidens” in the opening scene of part five of the play at the Court Theatre revival in September 1924.

³In *What I Believe* (London: Kegan, Paul, 1925), Russell attacked the “theological superstitions” of the clergy’s opposition to contraception, asserting that the disease, poverty, and suffering experienced by so many newborns is “deliberately inflicted by Bishops and

Hulton Archive/Getty Images



W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot meeting in the US, circa 1925

tween religion and science; he can be concerned only with conflicts between particular beliefs which he holds qua Christian or Moslem or Buddhist, and particular scientific theories which also he believes. To the Christian, a conflict between Islam and science, or between Buddhism and science (and reciprocally in respect of the other religious beliefs) can give only a mild satisfaction. The conflict between religion and science is a conflict between two quite unreal phantoms—for I am so sure that “religion” in the abstract is a phantom, that I am inclined to believe that “science” in the abstract is a phantom too.⁶

This is a mere outline of an argument: but I have said enough to suggest to any intelligent person that if one is to talk about a “conflict,” one must hold a definite religious faith, and must find it in conflict in particulars with certain conclusions of particular sciences. You may be a “fundamentalist” Christian; in that case you may find it difficult to reconcile your Christianity with the beliefs of geology and comparative anatomy. In that event you must choose; you must make up your mind whether the particular beliefs contradicted by geology or comparative anatomy are essential to your faith or no. There you have a real conflict. But Professor Whitehead is wholly occupied with phantom conflicts. He assumes that “science” (a fiction) is in conflict with God (another fiction), and he proceeds to show that science is far from being hostile to God, that on the contrary it requires Him, as the principle of Order.

And Professor Whitehead is so efficient, so hustling and forward-looking, that he has not stopped to consider how much is required for a religion besides God. He has not spent as many years in America as I have, but he has been very quickly adopted into the fraternity of the American Godhead. America is said to be “on the make”; Professor Whitehead’s religion must be “in the making.” Even in America, a motor-car “in the making” is not so much prized as a motor-car which is made and will run; but apparently luxury articles like religion are more valuable “in the making” than when they are made. It is the hopeless belief of a person who knows that when his religion is made, it *won’t* run; but he enjoys making it.

If Professor Whitehead were a Christian, instead of what he obviously is, merely the descendant of Christians, he would know that there is no such thing as “religion,” and that to prove the existence of God, even to prove that God is the wholehearted supporter of “science,” is to do nothing at all for religion. There was once a time when the terms “Christian,” “atheist” and “agnostic” meant something definite. If they are to continue to mean anything definite, then a fourth term must be invented for that large class of persons which includes Professor Whitehead. They are “religious,” without holding to any religion; they are also “scientific,” in that they believe devoutly in the latest theory of any and every particular science; and they must be cast out by any congregation

politicians in the name of morality” (p. 43). Eliot had recently quoted from the work in “John Bramhall,” in critical illustration of Russell’s moral philosophy.

⁴In *The World of William Clissold* (1926), Wells’s industrialist protagonist aims to redesign the world as a utopia to be managed and saved by men like himself, who place their faith in science, industry, and finance.

⁵Science and the Modern World, p. 259.

⁶See Eliot’s “Religion and Science: A Phantom Dilemma” (1932).



"THE FUTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS"

MONDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2015

6:30 PM - 8:00 PM

THE GREAT HALL, CITY COLLEGE OF NEW YORK



Aryeh Neier,
Open Society Foundations

author of

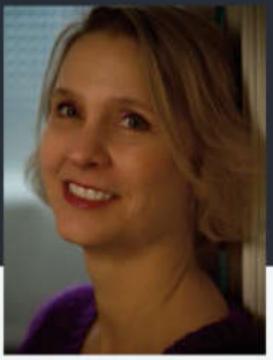
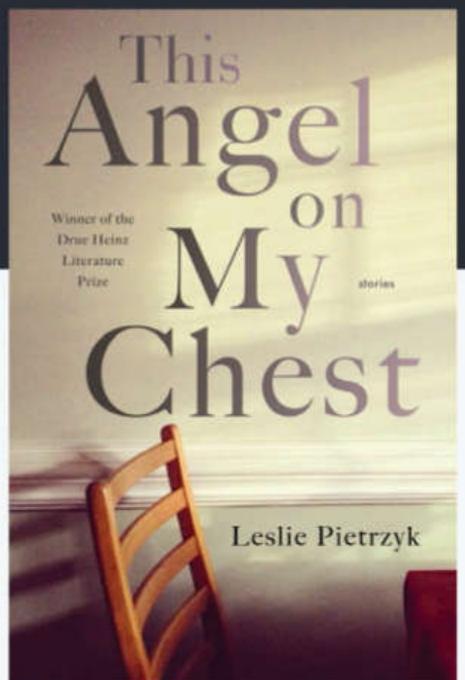
"The International Human Rights Movement: A History"

&

Gay McDougall, Minority Rights Group International
Martina Vandenberg, Human Trafficking Pro Bono Legal Center
Moderated By Eric Weitz, Dean, Humanities & the Arts, CCNY

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This Angel on My Chest

LESLIE PIETRZYK

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"With a delicate balance of cleverness and emotion, the stories in Pietrzyk's collection explore the event of her husband's sudden death at the breakfast table in 1997. The author's wit, clarity, and literary inventiveness dance circles around the omnipresent sadness, making this book a prime example of the furious creative energy that can explode from the collision of grief with talent and craftsmanship. [This Angel on My Chest] is the winner of the distinguished Drue Heinz Literature Prize, upholding its tradition of excellence in short fiction."—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

of Christians, Buddhists, Brahmins, Jews, Mohammedans or Atheists.

For Professor Whitehead seems to think that you can make a perfectly good substitute religion if only you provide a GOD of some kind. He is all in the tradition of the late William James, and of Professor Bergson, with the patronage of one who was, in his time, an admirable political philosopher, but a very feeble-minded theologian—the respected Matthew Arnold. Arnold's God was a power, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness; that was bad enough⁷; James's God was a power, one of ourselves (a regular guy and the Captain of the Team) working with us for our own ends, though neither He nor we know quite what these ends are—anyway, we pull all together. Whitehead's God is slightly more respectable, as He ought to be; He is the Principle of Order.⁸ But like James's God, he is wholly incapable of starting a Religion.

God is certainly essential to *some* religions, as the King is essential in the game of chess. But the most important things in any religion, and certainly the most important ideas in the Christian religion, are not derivative from the notion of God. I commend to the notice of Whitehead and his admirers the following passage from the notes of the late T. E. Hulme, the most remarkable theologian of my generation. And I would remind the admirers of Professor Whitehead that mathematics or mathematical physics is a difficult study, requiring a gradual furnishing of a man's mind through many years with a special furniture; and that theology is another difficult study, also requiring the furnishing of a mind through many years with special furniture; and that it cannot be expected that one mind should be able to contain both kinds.

What is important, is what nobody seems to realise—the dogmas like that of Original Sin, which are the closest expression of the categories of the religious attitude. That man is in no sense perfect, but a wretched creature, who can yet apprehend perfection. It is not, then, that I put up with the dogma for the sake of the sentiment, but that I may possibly swallow the sentiment for the sake of the dogma. Very few since the Renaissance have really understood the dogma, certainly very few inside the Churches of recent years. If they appear occasionally even fanatical about the very word of the dogma, that is only a secondary result of belief really grounded on sentiment. Certainly no humanist could understand the dogma. They

⁷See *Literature and Dogma: An Essay Towards a Better Apprehension of the Bible* (James R. Osgood, 1873): "an enduring Power, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness" (p. 172).

⁸In *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead states in his chapter on "God": "In the place of Aristotle's God as Prime Mover, we require God as the Principle of Concretion" (p. 250). "The general principle of empiricism depends upon the doctrine that there is a principle of concretion which is not discoverable by abstract reason. What further can be known about God must be sought in the region of particular experiences, and therefore rests on an empirical basis" (p. 257).

all chatter about matters which are in comparison with this, quite secondary notions—God, Freedom, and Immortality.⁹

I find that I can subscribe wholly to this view. I also find that it is antithetical to the Whitehead view, which is merely the James view of God, the Bergson view of Freedom, warmed over for a rather more exacting generation. It would be proper at this point to enter upon an explanation of the meaning of dogma, and of epistemology and *gegenstandstheorie* in relation to dogma.¹⁰ That would take a good deal of space. But I may remark that for anyone who is seriously concerned, not with "religion," that gilded abstraction, but with Christianity, there is far more to be learned from Irving Babbitt's *Democracy and Leadership* than from Professor Whitehead's soporific elixirs.¹¹

Textual Note

In late summer 1927, Eliot wrote to Lewis about a contribution to *The Enemy*: "Would you object to something about Whitehead, from point of view not identical with yours, but I believe pointing the same way?" Lewis had attacked Whitehead's time-philosophy in chapters 18 and 19 of "The Revolutionary Simpleton" in the first number (February 1927). In the second number (September 1927), it was announced that "The Enemy, No. 3, will contain...an article by Mr. T. S. Eliot, in which he discusses the nature of Professor Whitehead's god, and further elucidation of post-relativity philosophy by Mr. Wyndham Lewis" (vii–viii). When the number had not appeared on November 7, Eliot replied to an inquiry from Edmund Wilson of The New Republic: "Thank you for your cable about my note on Whitehead. I have no idea when that is likely to appear as Wyndham Lewis's *Enemy* is not a very punctual publication, but I have thought over your suggestion. On the whole I think I should much prefer not to publish this note elsewhere. I am not satisfied with it and if I had time I should already have revised it." When the third and final number of *The Enemy* appeared ("First Quarter, 1929"), Eliot's essay was not included. The proofs remained among Lewis's papers and are now in the Lewis Collection (Box 102), Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University. □

⁹T. E. Hulme's "The Religious Attitude" (*Speculations*, edited by Herbert Read, p. 71).

¹⁰*Gegenstandstheorie*: theory of objects; from Alexius Meinong, *Über Gegenstandstheorie* (1904), frequently cited in Eliot's dissertation, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley*.

¹¹In "The Idea of a Literary Review" (January 1926), Eliot identified Babbitt's *Democracy and Leadership* (1924) as one of the works exhibiting a "modern tendency" toward "classicism." On April 29, 1927, he wrote to Roger Chitty, "I have had in suspense in my mind an essay pointing out Babbitt's (unconscious) relation to orthodox Christianity: his doctrine of Grace, in *Democracy and Leadership*, is singularly near to Christianity, and in my opinion cannot be made acceptable without Christianity."

The Myths of Cesar Chavez

Timothy Noah

Cesar Chavez
a film directed by Diego Luna

The Crusades of Cesar Chavez
by Miriam Pawel.
Bloomsbury, 548 pp.,
\$35.00; \$22.00 (paper)

The civil rights movement of the 1960s gets a much better press than the labor movement. Yet the two causes were intertwined. Walter Reuther, president of the United Auto Workers, stood beside Martin Luther King while he gave his “I Have a Dream” speech. King spent the last day of his life speaking to sanitation workers who were trying to affiliate with Jerry Wurf’s American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees. Civil rights, it was understood, were tangled up with economic rights. Today we’ve wrenched them apart, to the detriment of both, and especially of organized labor.

Cesar Chavez is the one labor figure from the 1960s who remains a household name. That’s mostly because he’s remembered as a champion for Latinos generally and Mexican-Americans specifically. Chavez himself disdained union leaders. He saw his cause as much larger than a labor movement. But it was as president and cofounder of the United Farm Workers (UFW) that Chavez made his mark, and it’s as a union leader that the film director Diego Luna and the scriptwriters Keir Pearson and Timothy J. Sexton portray him in their underappreciated 2014 film, *Cesar Chavez*.

American movies about labor unions are rare—the last decent one was John Sayles’s *Matewan* (1987)—and upbeat movies about unions rarer still. *Cesar Chavez* is both. It tells the story of Chavez’s 1970 victory over California grape growers with more dramatic restraint than is often the case with biopics, and with closer adherence to the facts. It’s a shame the film received scant attention on its theatrical release; as popular art and as history it’s superior to the much-praised *Selma*. Drawn from a similarly inspirational story, *Selma* struck me as a pretty good movie marred by its melodramatic and inaccurate portrayal of President Lyndon Johnson.* *Cesar Chavez* contains its own somewhat melodramatic portrayal of a president—Ronald Reagan in his days as California governor. But where *Selma* has Tom Wilkinson as Johnson, *Cesar Chavez* shows the Gipper himself in archival news footage hammily popping grapes into his mouth and telling reporters that Chavez’s movement is “immoral.”

The end titles of *Cesar Chavez* inform viewers that five years after Chavez’s victory in 1970 the UFW successfully lobbied the California state government for a law—still the only one in the nation—providing regulatory protection to farmworkers who seek to join a union. That’s a suitably triumphant coda, and a truthful one. But it’s also incomplete. After the grape boycott Chavez’s story grew stranger and

darker—dramatic in its own way, but closer in tone to *Citizen Kane*.

As Miriam Pawel relates in her authoritative biography—the second of two books she has written about the UFW’s rise and fall—Chavez’s personal obsessions, combined with his sudden fame and power, and some of the more malign elements of America’s culture in the 1970s, gradually caused him to turn narcissistic and to encourage a cult built around him. That might not have proved consequential had Chavez relinquished control of his or-

ownership. Their giant parcels, few of them surveyed, remained intact after the US acquired California in 1848. Many of them, McWilliams reports, were based on fraudulent land grants hastily drawn up before the transfer to US sovereignty. Congress and the California state government then compounded the monopolization by granting the railroads much of what remained.

This vast acreage constituted, through the happy accident of California’s particular climate and geological history, the richest farmland in the United States, although much of

Even as Donald Trump threatens to expel undocumented immigrants, evidence has mounted that the post-1965 migration wave from Mexico, which accounts for the vast majority of the undocumented, is ending. According to Jens Manuel Krogstad and Jeffrey S. Passel of the Pew Research Center, 2014 was the first year in more than six decades in which more non-Mexicans than Mexicans were apprehended at the US border. The decline began in 2000, and so can’t plausibly be attributed to the recession; a likelier cause is Mexico’s improving economy.

Cesar Chavez, the son of Mexican immigrants, was born in 1927 on a small Arizona homestead built by his grandfather. The family lost the farm near the end of the Depression and moved to California to work in the fields. Cesar stayed in school there for three years—long enough to complete eighth grade—then joined his family in the fields, tending sugar beets and onions in winter, cauliflower, carrots, broccoli, and cabbage in spring, plums, walnuts, and grapes in summer, and lima beans, chilis, corn, peaches, plums, and tomatoes in the fall.

Chavez served two years in the navy and advanced to a better-paid job stacking and sorting lumber when his quick intelligence and astonishing capacity for hard work caught the attention of an Anglo community organizer named Fred Ross. In no time Chavez was running the San Jose office of Ross’s Community Service Organization (CSO), a grassroots group set up to register Mexican-Americans to vote. Eventually Ross persuaded the Chicago community organizer Saul Alinsky to fund the CSO through his Industrial Areas Foundation, enabling Ross to hire Chavez full-time at \$400 a week. Like migrant farming, the work was itinerant, requiring Chavez to move constantly throughout the state.

Ross had a rare gift for community organizing. His protégé Chavez became Ross’s equal and then surpassed him. But two aspects of the CSO frustrated Chavez. One was that the local organizations he built up so assiduously tended to fall apart after he left. The other was that they tended, over time, to be taken over by Mexican-Americans with middle-class aspirations that Chavez held in contempt. Chavez had become inspired by the examples of Saint Francis and Gandhi. He longed to create and control his own organization that would aid the poor through nonviolent protest. These impulses served Chavez well when, in 1962, he left the CSO to organize farm workers. With his wife Helen and their eight children he resettled in Delano, a small railroad town at the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley that was the center of the nation’s grape industry.

Starting a union for California farmworkers was a uniquely difficult task. There were no factory gates where an organizer could hand out leaflets; workers were scattered across vast outdoor spaces, and usually were around for only part of the year. The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), the New



Robert Kennedy passing a piece of bread to Cesar Chavez at the end of Chavez’s fast during the farm workers’ strike against grape growers, Delano, California, March 1968

ganization to more practical-minded workers, as charismatic leaders often do. But Chavez was a control freak, ever more suspicious of even his closest associates, and he wouldn’t let go. The result was that he failed to enforce and build on union contracts that he had fought for with tactical brilliance. The tragedy of Cesar Chavez’s life was that, having achieved the task of creating a union in an industry uniquely able to resist one, he botched the much less difficult challenge of sustaining it. The California farmworkers ended up only somewhat better off than they were when the Joads journeyed west from the Dust Bowl.

There has never been a time when California agriculture conformed to the Jeffersonian ideal of the yeoman farmer. The journalist Carey McWilliams observed in his muckraking 1939 history, *Factories in the Field*:

Travelers along the highways pass through orchards that seem literally measureless and gaze upon vast tracts of farm land stretching away on either side of the road to the distant foothills, yet, curiously enough, there seem to be no farms in the accepted sense. One looks in vain for the incidents of rural life: the schoolhouse on the hilltop, the comfortable homes, the compact and easy indolence of the countryside. Where are the farmers? Where are the farmhouses?

Under Spanish and Mexican rule wealthy families had dominated land

*A comment on *Selma* appears along with other footnotes in the Web version of this review at www.nybooks.com

Deal law that provided some protections to employees and unions during organizing drives, didn't cover agricultural workers. Previous attempts at unionization had repeatedly been crushed by the growers and by local law enforcement, often violently, with eager cooperation from the courts.

But vineyards had certain advantages. "Vines were not like lettuce or tomatoes," Pawel writes. Seasonal crops were "planted in one field this year and in a different place the next." Grapes were year-round crops that stayed put, which meant the workers stayed put, too.

Chavez began by joining forces with Filipino farmworkers in a strike near Palm Springs. Other strikes followed. From the start Chavez rejected the idea that he and Dolores Huerta, a former CSO coworker who became his partner in the new effort, were running a union. Partly this was tactical, because winning support from influential labor leaders like Walter Reuther depended on not treading too obviously on the turf of the Filipinos' fledgling union, which was chartered by the AFL-CIO. (Eventually Chavez's and Huerta's group would merge with it to form the United Farm Workers.) But Chavez also meant it. "When you read of labor organizing in this country, you can say there is a point where labor is 'organized,'" he said. "But in community organizing, there is never a point where you can say, 'It is organized.'"

Chavez knew that strikes and boycotts couldn't be won without getting some support from national public opinion. The local sheriff, Leroy Galyen, helped out by warning that any picketer who shouted *huelga* (Spanish for "strike") to farmworkers would be in violation of the law. Chavez quickly arranged for forty-eight women, including Helen, to get arrested shouting *huelga*. (The Chavez biopic injects a note of feminist defiance here by having Helen do this against Chavez's wishes.) The arrests drew the attention of a Senate subcommittee on migratory labor, which in March 1966 traveled to Delano to hold a hearing. Senator Robert Kennedy rose splendidly to the occasion when he questioned Galyen. The scene in the movie follows the transcript almost verbatim:

RFK: Who told you that they're going to riot?

Galyen: The men right out in the field that they were talking to said, "If you don't get them out of here, we're going to cut their hearts out." So rather than let them get cut, we removed the cause.

RFK: This is the most interesting concept, I think, that you suddenly hear or you talk about the fact that somebody makes a report about somebody going to get out of order, perhaps violate the law, and you go and arrest them, and they haven't done anything wrong. How can you go arrest somebody if they haven't violated the law?

According to Pawel, it was Reuther who had the wit to press Kennedy to attend the hearings; according to John Gregory Dunne, who wrote a lively contemporary account, it was Kennedy's aide Peter Edelman. Maybe both did. In any event, "it was Robert Kennedy who legitimized Chavez,"

Dunne wrote. The partnership that developed was, in the manner of most political alliances, mutually beneficial: "Kennedy's real concern for the farm workers helped soften his image as a self-serving keeper of his brother's flame," Dunne wrote, "and in turn plugged Chavez into the power outlets of Washington and New York."

The two men's shared Catholicism was part of the drama at their second joint appearance when Chavez broke the first of many lengthy public fasts. These were intended to turn public opinion against the grape growers. Six days before Kennedy announced his candidacy for president, he flew to Delano to pass Chavez a piece of bread while news cameras rolled. Kennedy couldn't escape resembling a

farmworkers, farmworkers remained free to engage in secondary boycotts. So Chavez launched them, targeting distributors for the big grocery chains, concentrating efforts in New York, Giumarra's biggest market.

Chavez used his newfound celebrity to go on TV and tell people not to buy Giumarra grapes. Table grapes were an especially shrewd boycott target, Pawel notes, because they weren't a staple. Grapes were a "luxury item"—a tasty snack food, low in calories but not particularly rich in nutrients. Nobody *needed* grapes. After Giumarra started disguising its product by borrowing labels from other growers, Chavez expanded the boycott to all California grapes. "This is simple blackmail," Reagan fumed, and, in



An immigrant couple on a farm labor bus, Fresno, California, 2004; photograph by Matt Black. An exhibition of his work, 'The Geography of Poverty,' is on view at Anastasia Photo, New York City, until November 1, 2015.

priest giving Holy Communion. Three months later, Kennedy was assassinated in Los Angeles and the scene acquired a second meaning as the passing of a torch.

By the summer of 1967 Chavez had achieved modest success, winning half a dozen contracts. But he hadn't won any from the growers of table grapes; the previous targets had been makers of wines and canned goods. The largest table grape grower in California—and the largest grape grower of any kind in the San Joaquin Valley—was the family-owned Giumarra company. To take on Giumarra, Chavez ingeniously turned his union's greatest weakness—its lack of federal protection under the NLRA—into its greatest asset.

One of the most potent weapons a union can use against management is a secondary boycott—a boycott, that is, not against a product, but against an independent business (say, a store) that sells that product. The maker of the product will fight a boycott with all his force, because it imperils his entire business. But a seller probably won't, because he has far less at stake. If the product becomes a costly nuisance he'll just take it down from the shelves. Create a costly nuisance for enough sellers and you can bring a producer to his knees.

Secondary boycotts are so powerful a tactic that Congress outlawed them in the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, which scaled back labor protections generally in reaction to a wave of postwar strikes. But because Taft-Hartley was a series of amendments to the NLRA, and because the NLRA exempted

ing power it won in 1970," and asked, "Is Chavez Beaten?"

Chavez moved the UFW's headquarters from Delano, near the farmworkers, to an abandoned tuberculosis sanitarium isolated high in the Tehachapi Mountains that he called La Paz. Chavez relocated his family there and insisted that the other UFW officials do the same; disgruntled UFW employees called it "Magic Mountain." The organization Chavez wanted to be more than a union was turning into a cult. There were frequent purges, with Chavez abruptly accusing aides of being Communists or in cahoots with the growers.

Eventually Chavez fell in with Charles Dederich, a recovering alcoholic who had founded a drug rehabilitation organization called Synanon and turned it into a religious cult. Synanon followers wore orange overalls, listened raptly to Dederich's mumbo-jumbo, and played something called the Synanon Game, a truth-seeking free-for-all in which participants were invited to abuse one another verbally. "I manipulate the environment," Dederich told his new disciple, Chavez. "That's my triangle job." Eventually Dederich would be arrested for having a follower place a rattlesnake in the mailbox of a lawyer who'd successfully sued Synanon on behalf of a female abductee. But well before that happened Chavez was requiring UFW employees to attend regular sessions of the Synanon Game at La Paz.

The UFW's policies toward undocumented workers turned ugly. Chavez had always regarded guest workers and undocumented immigrants as a reserve army of potential scabs—a threat to collective bargaining. That was the standard view unions took toward immigration generally. But when Huerta suggested to Chavez that they avoid the term "wetback," Chavez replied angrily, "They're wets, you know. They're wets, and let's go after them." The UFW created its own private security patrol along the southern Arizona border—a "wet line"—to stop Mexicans who were trying to cross it illegally. Frequent reports surfaced of beatings by thugs whom the Mexican victims identified as *cesarchavistas*. An investigation by the Mexican state of Sonora concluded that the UFW was bribing local police to look the other way when it acted violently.

The UFW's fortunes revived with the 1974 election as governor of California of Jerry Brown, a former seminarian who admired Chavez. Brown signed into law the Agricultural Labor Relations Act, a sort of NLRA just for farmworkers that expedited union elections and punished growers who declined to negotiate in good faith. By early 1976 the UFW had picked up 192 new contracts.

It was also under Brown that the California state government banned *el cortito*, the notorious short-handled hoe that required farmworkers to bend over as they moved across the fields. Growers had claimed the work couldn't be done as well with a long-handled hoe, but the real reason they resisted banning *el cortito* was that foremen could instantly tell whether a worker was taking a break by standing upright. The tool was so potent a symbol of oppression that it now sits on permanent

display at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington.

Removing *el cortito* was largely the work of a young lawyer named Maurice Jourdane, who worked for California Rural Legal Assistance, an office created by Washington's short-lived Office of Economic Opportunity as part of Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. But Jourdane took on the work only after prodding from Chavez. For Chavez the issue was personal, because he'd suffered all his adult life from bouts of severe back pain, the likely result of his own childhood years of stoop labor in the fields.

But through the 1970s and 1980s Chavez grew progressively less interested in running a union at all. "Repeatedly," Pawel writes,

Chavez made clear that what excited him was not elections, contracts, or negotiations (which he called "non-missionary" work) but building a community so that everyone would love being in La Paz as much as he did. "If we don't do that," he said, "then we don't have a movement."

Chavez urged UFW officers to emulate not only Synanon but also Hare Krishna and the Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church. When the UFW celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary in 1987 it was losing more elections than it was winning. Farmworkers told reporters touring California's agricultural valleys that they'd never seen a UFW organizer. Six years later, Chavez died abruptly from heart failure that seems likely to have been caused by one of his fasts.

In 2006 Pawel published in the *Los Angeles Times* a memorable series of reports on the UFW after Chavez. By then the union had no grape contracts, and represented fewer than seven thousand farmworkers. It was moving into industries other than farming, which meant that it fell under the NLRA and could no longer organize secondary boycotts. Dues, which during Chavez's lifetime had made up about two thirds of the union's budget, were down to a third. If the UFW has signed a farm contract within the past two years, I find no evidence on its website; the last posted, a wine grape contract with Papagni Fruit Company, is dated January 2013.

How do farmworkers fare today? They have bathrooms in the fields; when Chavez started out they often didn't. They have long-handled hoes. But the average pay for a California farmworker, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, is \$19,950, which puts him well below the federal poverty line for a family of four. "In the canyons of Carlsbad north of San Diego," Pawel reported in her 2006 series,

hundreds of farmworkers burrow into the hills each year, covering their [plastic] shacks with leaves and branches to stay out of view of multimillion-dollar homes. They live without drinking water, toilets, refrigeration. Fireworks and music from nearby Legoland pierce the nighttime skies.

In a larger camp a dozen miles to the south in Del Mar, farmworkers wash their clothes in a stream, bathe in the soapy water, then catch crayfish that they boil for dinner.

It sounds like they need a union. □

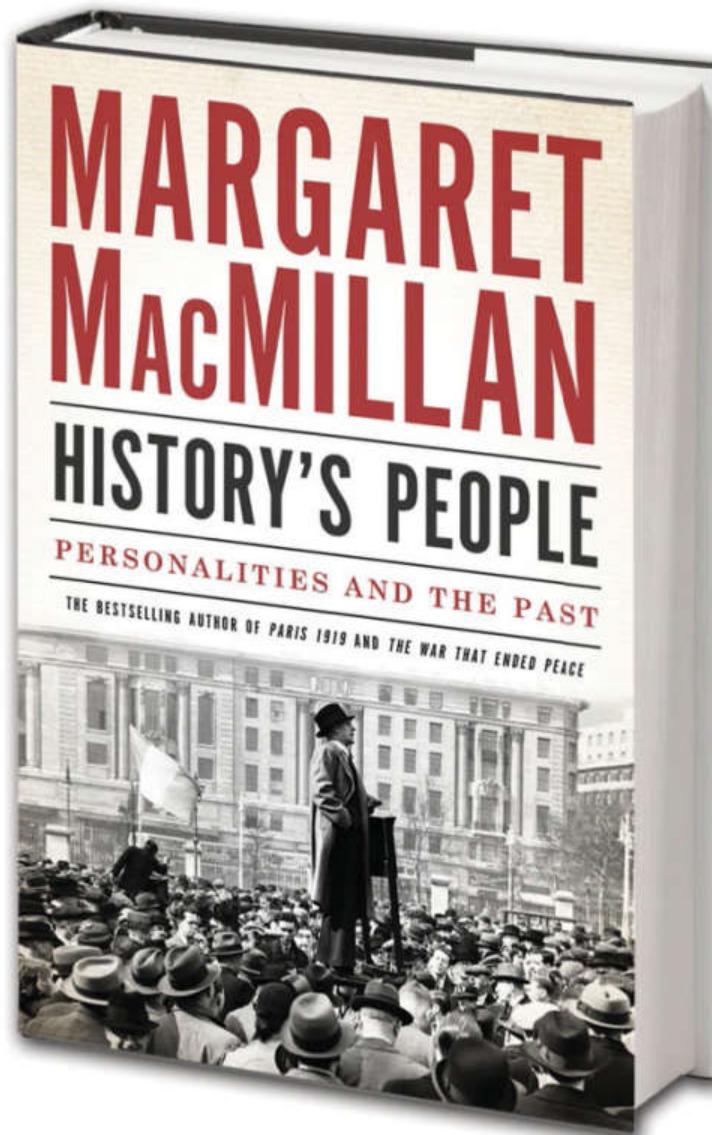
SHADOW

Here you are close to me again
Memories of my companions killed in the war
The olive of time
Memories that make just one
As a hundred pelts make just one fur coat
As these thousands of wounds make just one newspaper article
Somber impalpable appearance that has taken on
The changing shape of my shadow
An Indian crouching in ambush for eternity
Shadow you creep up close to me
But you don't hear me anymore
You will no longer know the heavenly poems I sing
But I hear you I still see you
Destinies
Multiple shadow may the sun watch over you
You love me enough to never leave me
You who dance in the sun without raising any dust
Shadow ink of the sun
Handwriting of my light
Caisson of regrets
A god who humbles himself

—Guillaume Apollinaire

(Translated from the French by Ron Padgett)

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The Wonder-Wounded Harold Bloom

Christopher Benfey

The Daemon Knows: Literary Greatness and the American Sublime

by Harold Bloom.

Spiegel and Grau, 524 pp., \$35.00

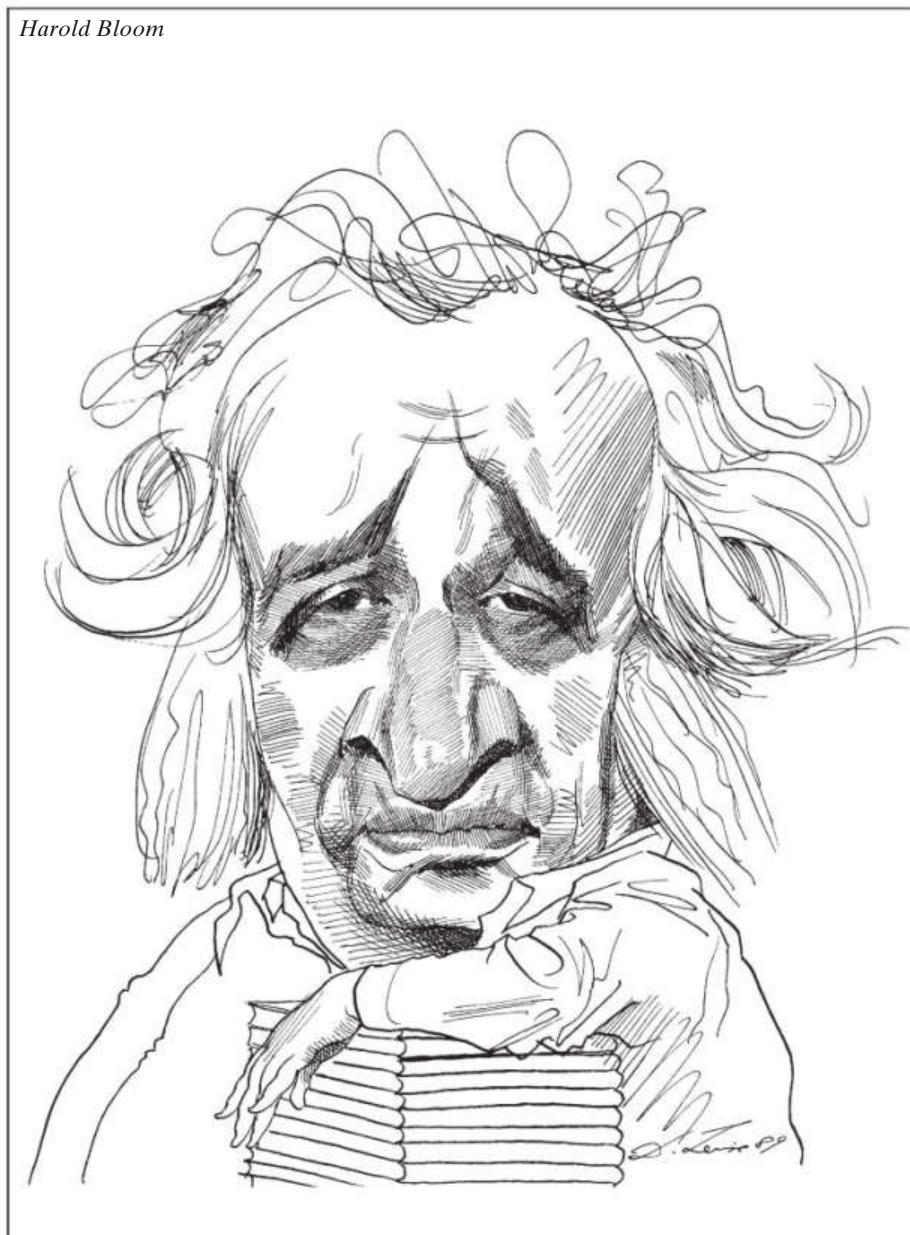
At eighty-five, Harold Bloom is among the foremost literary critics at work today; he is also, surely, one of the strangest. He has seemed at times an impassioned guardian of the acknowledged masterpieces of *The Western Canon* (the title of his book of 1994), reaffirming the preeminence of Dante or Shakespeare (whom he credits, in his hyperbolic way, with “the invention of the human”) against what he dismissively calls the School of Resentment, critics who, in his view, adopt a coercive political agenda (“Stalinism without Stalin”) for judging literary works, combing through books for evidence of racism, gender bias, and other social evils. “Literature is not an instrument of social change or an instrument of social reform,” he has said. “It is more a mode of human sensations and impressions, which do not reduce very well to societal rules or forms.”

Bloom traces his own unembarrassed zest for reading works of creative genius to the life-changing experience, as an awkward Yiddish-speaking boy growing up in the East Bronx, of reading for the first time the poetry of William Blake and Hart Crane. This ecstatic experience, he writes in his latest book, *The Daemon Knows*, which is devoted to a dozen major figures in American literature from Emerson to Faulkner, “transformed a changeless child into an exegetical enthusiast adept at appreciation.”

In addition to his works on canonical writers, however, Bloom has published idiosyncratic books on what he calls, with kindred enthusiasm, “the American religion,” a loose set of religious practices based on reports of direct experience of the divine, and bearing little relation, in Bloom’s view, to received European traditions. “Brooding upon the highly original stances of Emerson, Whitman, Melville, and Dickinson had been my starting point,” he writes in *The Daemon Knows*, “but my wonder-wandering among rather less articulate American Religionists changed my way of thinking about the United States.” In *The American Religion* (1992), he singled out for praise the imaginative genius of Joseph Smith, founder of the Church of Latter Day Saints.

A related book, *Omens of Millennium* (1996), is a sympathetic response to such widespread American obsessions as guardian angels, prophetic dreams, and near-death experiences. Bloom’s aim is not to discount reports of such things but rather to hold them to a higher, Arnoldian imaginative standard, “to measure our current encounters with these phenomena against the best that has been known and written about them in the past.” Aligning his passion for religious experience with his enthusiasm for poetry, Bloom suggests that “we had better credit any angelic sightings now and hereafter only when they are reported by

Harold Bloom



prophets, seers, and revelators, or by great poets.”

1.

Bloom first came to prominence in 1973, with the publication of what probably remains—among some forty books and hundreds of prefaces he has contributed to the Chelsea House digests of literary criticism—his best-known work, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. Reportedly written in a few days during the summer of 1967, after Bloom’s recovery from a severe midlife crisis, this difficult book takes up the seemingly old-fashioned question of literary influence, the domain, until Bloom, of source hunters and antiquarians, as satirized by Robert Frost:

*To entertain the critic pack
The poet has to leave a track
Of torn up scraps of prior poets.*

Bloom dismisses the superficial fixation on “the transmission of ideas and images from earlier to later poets,” seeking to explore instead the deeper competition (or “agon”), reminiscent of the struggle between sons and fathers as analyzed by Freud, between living writers and the intimidating literary achievements of the past.

“One aim of this theory is corrective,” Bloom wrote, “to de-idealize our accepted accounts of how one poet

helps to form another.” He rejected a reassuringly fraternal view of influence such as Herman Melville’s: “For genius, all over the world, stands hand in hand, and one shock of recognition runs the whole circle round.” Bloom conceded that transactions among poets might indeed encompass altruism. “But where generosity is involved,” he added caustically, “the poets influenced are minor or weaker; the more generosity, and the more mutual it is, the poorer the poets involved.”

It was easy for readers to align the dark truths on offer in *The Anxiety of Influence*—that “the meaning of a poem can only be another poem”; that poets systematically denigrate their precursors (“Poetry is misunderstanding, misinterpretation, misalliance”); and that poetry inevitably declines, as “belated” poets feed on the glories of previous achievements—with other apparently nihilistic books emanating, during the 1970s, from Yale, where Bloom has taught since 1955. In *Allegories of Reading*, Paul de Man argued that literature consisted of metaphors and other figures of speech with no clear connection to any reality outside the text. Jacques Derrida, in *Of Grammatology*, attacked the notion that there could be anything identifiable as a human “voice” in literary texts. It was difficult for readers to see that beneath Bloom’s seemingly nihilistic notions of literary influence, contrary to such “deconstruction,” he had a deep appreciation for literary originality against all

odds, a respectful gratitude that would become more emphatic in his later work.

2.

One might think that the American mythology of the self-made man, exemplified in the maxims of Benjamin Franklin and in Emerson’s great essay “Self-Reliance,” might exempt American writers from the more dire consequences of the anxiety of influence. Doesn’t our literature, like our nation, constitute a fresh start, that “American newness” that Irving Howe discerned in the age of Emerson and Thoreau, or the “American Adam” that Bloom’s Yale colleague R.W.B. Lewis identified as the most telling imaginative construct in our literature? What do mavericks and renegades like Whitman and Melville, Dickinson and Twain, owe to past writers anyway?

Not surprisingly, Bloom believes that American writers are merely more skillful in hiding their literary debts, bringing a fiercer resistance to the influence exerted by their intimidating precursors. For Bloom, such precursors must be primarily literary. He has no interest in the Puritans, none in the Great Awakening or the sermons of Jonathan Edwards. He barely mentions Franklin, accorded a memorable chapter in D.H. Lawrence’s exhilarating *Studies of Classic American Literature*, or any other eighteenth-century American writer, such as William Bartram, whose nature writings so influenced Coleridge and Wordsworth.

Instead, Bloom selects twelve writers, all of them canonical and, with the possible exception of Hart Crane, readily recognizable by most readers, all of them white and only one a woman, and juxtaposes them in six pairs. The first pairing is based on stature: Whitman and Melville are “our two most ambitious and sublime authors.” Others follow either recognized lines of influence—Emerson and Dickinson, Hawthorne and Henry James—or less obvious ones: Wallace Stevens and T.S. Eliot are said to be “odd progeny” of Whitman, whose work is “embedded so deep they cannot know it.” Still other pairings—Mark Twain with Robert Frost, Faulkner with Crane—seem merely puzzling, and more dutiful than impassioned. “When I began composing *The Daemon Knows*,” Bloom confesses, “I did not plan to include Twain and Frost.”

Bloom is aware of conspicuous omissions: Poe; the novels of Dreiser and Wharton, Cather and Hurston, Fitzgerald and Hemingway. These writers, he implies, have less of that “sublimity” that he seeks, less of the “daemon” of true originality, “the god within who generates poetic power.” (Poe, inventor of science fiction and the detective story, screams for inclusion here.) But Bloom’s touchstone for literary greatness has always been lyric poetry; the novels he singles out for the highest praise are those that most closely approach the verbal and emotional intensity of the lyric: *Moby-Dick*, which he calls “a Poem Unlimited,” and *As I*

Lay Dying, which “takes its place as a prose poem with the most vital American poetry of its time.”

Bloom ignores the oddball, genre-bending books that are some of the high points of American literature—*Life on the Mississippi*, *The Autobiography of Henry Adams*, *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, *The Souls of Black Folk*—and considers *Walden* an inferior shadow of Emerson. Even so, one might wish for more audacious choices, a wild card like Lincoln (the third of our great nineteenth-century poets, surely, in a prose sonnet like the Gettysburg Address or the overwhelmingly understated Second Inaugural) or the unfairly maligned Longfellow, ripe for Bloom’s passionate rescue.

But really there is no clear principle of selection, nor any overarching argument to this loosely assembled book. Bloom has said that his “lifelong critical hero Samuel Johnson” is his model here, and there may be parallels in the many prefaces the two critics have written, their assiduous attention to Shakespeare, their habitual ranking of poets, their supposed address to the “common reader.” But it is the garrulous and sociable Johnson of Boswell’s famous life that seems the better analogy for Bloom’s scattershot performance in *The Daemon Knows*.

His opinions, delivered with a bluff impatience, are sometimes inspired, sometimes maddening, and often repetitious. “I weary of scholars neighing against Ahab, who is magnificent in his heroism,” Bloom writes in his pithiest mode. “Would they have him hunt for more blubber?” He speculates freely on the love lives of his dozen writers, asserting—on what possible evidence?—that Hawthorne “had perhaps the happiest marriage of any major American writer, if not indeed of the great writers of all ages and nations,” despite such dark marital fables as “Wakefield” and “Young Goodman Brown.”

Sometimes Bloom takes his prompting from the table talk of friends. “I recall conversations with Gershom Scholem in Jerusalem and New Haven, during which he discoursed upon his conviction that Whitman was ‘an intuitive Kabbalist.’” Much of the somewhat chaotic section on Hart Crane, inspired by the dubious claim that the long poem *The Bridge* incorporates an internal pun on “bride,” is based on similar exchanges. “My mentor and friend Kenneth Burke remarked to me that Crane mentioned the bridge/bride kenning to him in conversations.”

At its most tedious, the book descends into bland listicles of asserted, though undemonstrated, influence:

Though Whitman is not mentioned in [Crane’s] *Atlantis*, he pervades the poem. Shelley’s *Adonais* is an elegy for John Keats, yet it becomes a premonitory threnody for Shelley himself. *Atlantis* is a lament for Walt Whitman and for his vision of the United States as being in itself the greatest poem. Unlike T. S. Eliot, against whom Crane’s struggle was for his own style, the agon with the prophetic Walt is darker, more profound, and far more anxious. How much had *Song of Myself* left for *The Bridge* to originate?

One can tease out of this tangle a useful distinction between merely stylistic

influence (Eliot on Crane) and something deeper, more “agonistic” (Whitman’s influence), but it is rough going, and one wonders what work Shelley and Keats are doing in the mix. The entire question of influence for Bloom must be full of supposition, partly depending as it does on his self-projection into one murky unconscious after another.

3.

Bloom finds Emerson’s influence—what he calls “Emerson’s American Religion of self-reliance”—everywhere in American literature, as much in the willful heroines of Hawthorne and James as in Whitman’s optimistic embrace of a special American destiny. He is particularly drawn to Haw-



Lillian Gish as Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*, 1926

thorne’s “sensual and tragic” Hester Prynne, “worshipping only the god within herself” as she falls for men, “her Satanic husband, Chillingworth, and her inadequate lover, Dimmesdale,” clearly unworthy of her. James’s Isabel Archer is another, paler, Hester, who “repeats her forerunner’s refusal to abandon an Emersonian self-reliance” in her dreadful marital choice of Gilbert Osmond. For Bloom, these vividly imagined women exceed the novels that seek to contain them. “Hopelessly old-fashioned critic that I am, I do not regard achieved literary characters as so many marks upon the page or as metaphors for racial, gender, and class differences.”

Emily Dickinson is another of Emerson’s acolytes, in Bloom’s view; subjecting all inherited claims, religious and intellectual, to her own withering skepticism, “she surpasses even the strongest of her American contemporaries in self-reliance.” “Except for Shakespeare,” Bloom has written, “Dickinson manifests more cognitive originality than any other Western poet since Dante,” though his brief remarks about individual poems give no clear idea of such originality, and register her puzzling ellipses and her flair for comedy instead. Lacking the patience to unpack the formal and verbal intricacies of Dickinson’s poetry or anyone else’s, preferring to register his emotional response instead, Bloom has never excelled at close reading; in this book of nearly five hundred pages, he claims that he “cannot give too much space to close readings of individual poems.”

In Bloom’s view, “with her high art working concealment of her drive against anteriority,” Dickinson fiercely

resists her precursor Emerson, whom Bloom wishfully claims, more than once, that she met in Amherst when he lectured there. Her biographers have been more circumspect. Polly Longsworth says flatly, “There is no record of whether Emily Dickinson heard or spoke with him.” Bloom refers, mistakenly, to “her brother’s mistress and second wife, Millicent Todd Bingham”; Bingham was the daughter of her brother’s mistress, Mabel Loomis Todd, who never married Austin Dickinson. It is also unfortunate that the illustration accompanying the section on “Miss Dickinson,” as Bloom patronizingly calls her, is the doctored daguerreotype of the 1920s, with girlish curls and lace collar added.

There are moments when one wishes that Bloom were even more Bloomian. Can he be right that Mark Twain, accorded a notably brief treatment in *The Daemon Knows*, had no significant precursors, no anxiety of influence, beyond a vague debt to Cervantes and Swift? “Of no genre,” *Huckleberry Finn* has, in his view, been “creatively misread” by Hemingway and Fitzgerald as “nostalgia for a lost American dream,” but Bloom doesn’t quite know how to read the book otherwise, settling for his usual suspect: “It is as though his creator, Twain, wants him to emulate Benjamin Franklin and Henry Thoreau but cannot keep Huck away from Emersonianism” and the “need to keep moving.” Might it be the case, though, that Bloom fails to recognize Twain’s precursor in Fenimore Cooper, and that Twain’s notorious and rather schoolmarmish demolition, “Fenimore Cooper’s Literary Offences,” is precisely the kind of smokescreen obscuring his anxious debts that Bloom has found in T. S. Eliot’s early dismissal of Shelley and Whitman?

It is fun to listen to Bloom, in some of the freshest pages in *The Daemon Knows*, chew over his long feud with Eliot, whose own theory of literary influence, as outlined in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” is so much like Bloom’s. “No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone,” Eliot wrote.

His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead.

Bloom’s détente with Eliot is based in part on his late recognition of a shared vocation: “In old age I enter upon a kind of peace in my own lifelong struggle against Eliot’s criticism and regret some harshness indulged through the decades.... He was my antithetical precursor.”

Bloom now recognizes a powerful poet of old age in *Four Quartets*. “At eighty-four I cease from mental fight,” he concedes. “He was and is a great American poet.” He quotes a long, grim passage from “Little Gidding” about “the gifts reserved for age” (“First, the cold friction of expiring sense/Without enchantment.../Second, the conscious impotence of rage/At human folly, and the laceration/Of laughter at what ceases to amuse”) and finds its “strength and eloquence unsurpassable.” Echoing Dr. Johnson on Gray’s “Elegy,” he writes, “Had Eliot written often thus, it would be vain either to

praise or blame him.” And yet, he cannot resist a final, contradictory salvo of abuse:

His dogmatism, dislike of women, debasement of ordinary human existence make me furious. His virulent anti-Semitism, in the age of Hitler’s death camps, never abated and dangerously fused with his devotional stance of neo-Christianity. I dismiss the exegetes who defend him and Ezra Pound; at best they are misguided, at worst they participate in murderous attitudes toward Jews and Judaism.

Bloom acknowledges that he has strayed into the region of politically inspired criticism that he generally detests: “We do not read only as aesthetes—though we should—but also as responsible men and women. By that standard,” he concludes, “Eliot, despite his daemonic gift, is unacceptable once and for all time.”

4.

I have found myself wondering what Bloom’s title refers to. When he writes, in a recurring and mysterious refrain, “The daemon knows how it is done,” he seems to mean that great writers give themselves over to something stronger than themselves, and beyond their habitual understanding. Bloom firmly believes—against the tendencies of our current distrust of elitism of any kind—that there really is such a thing as great literature, books that in their supreme originality and strangeness truly do seem somehow superhuman or “daemonic.” He is particularly good at summoning us into their presence. And for all his bluff and grandiosity, Bloom brings a certain modesty to the critical task. He is in awe of these twelve writers.

What Bloom does not mean, despite his occasionally dogmatic tone, is that he himself knows how it is done. Some of the most moving moments in *The Daemon Knows* are when he confesses he hasn’t a clue. “These lines hammer me,” he writes of Whitman’s *Song of Myself*, “like those utterances of Macbeth’s that break into him from some higher realm of eloquence.” After quoting the extraordinary lines that follow the child’s question “What is the grass?” Bloom wonders, “How to convert my ravishment by this into knowledge?” What can one say, he asks, about that “most Homeric of American similes: ‘the beautiful uncut hair of graves’”? He concludes, disarmingly, “I read Walt and become, in Hamlet’s words, a wonder-wounded hearer.”

Bloom fell in love with the overwhelming music of Hart Crane’s poetry before he could understand a word of it. It is the very knowingness of many academic critics, their claim to see through everything to the political and social machinery that supposedly runs all literature, that drives him crazy. “The intolerance, the self-congratulation, smugness, sanctimoniousness, the retreat from imaginative values, the flight from the aesthetic,” he says. “It’s not worth being truly outraged about. Eventually these people will provide their own antidote, because they will perish of boredom. I will win in the end.”

The Unique Qualities of Joe Alsop

Isaiah Berlin

On Tuesday, September 19, 1989, two long-standing friends of the columnist and commentator Joseph Alsop, Washington Post journalist Robert Kaiser¹ and British historian of ideas Isaiah Berlin, were in the congregation at Alsop's memorial service at St. John's Church, Lafayette Square, Washington, D.C. Kaiser's father was an old friend of Berlin's, and Kaiser had known Berlin for many years.

On October 6, Kaiser wrote Berlin a letter that he described as "the product of ruminations about Joe Alsop, ruminations that leave me baffled." He told Berlin that he had known Alsop best in 1969–1970, when they were both reporting the Vietnam War, about which Alsop thought he "knew all the answers." "One of my most vivid memories is of him getting drunk twice a day. Too much before and at lunch, then a nap, then too much before, at and after dinner. At those meals—as at so many in his own houses in Washington—he was often a cruel bully, attacking all who disagreed with him, particularly reporters who wrote stories he didn't like."

*Kaiser had good things to say, too, telling an anecdote about Alsop beguiling children in a small Vietnamese town—"Joe at his best." But he found himself unable to place Alsop in his "mental closet." "Certainly he was almost unique here as a genuine intellectual who knew his own mind, and also just knew a lot. He also played a very important role in the (now ended) era of punditry, but I fear the high point of his career was in intimidating JFK to make a commitment in Vietnam, a tragic error." Moreover, Alsop "was a tormented soul, confused about his own sexuality, addicted to booze and tobacco, often just sad." Kaiser asked Berlin: "What does all this add up to? How did you understand the man?" Following is Berlin's reply, drawn from the fourth and final volume of his correspondence, *Affirming: Letters 1975–1997*, edited by Henry Hardy and Mark Pottle, to be published in the US later this year.*

—Henry Hardy

17 October 1989

Headington House

Dear Bob,

... All that you say about Joe Alsop rings entirely true. It is related to the substance of that play written about him by Art Buchwald,² which was put

¹Robert Greeley Kaiser (born 1943), US journalist, joined *The Washington Post* in 1964 and had assignments in London, Saigon, and Moscow before joining its national staff, 1974–1982; he was managing editor, 1991–1998; he came to know Alsop, a die-hard supporter of the war in Vietnam, during Alsop's visits there in 1969–1970.

²*Sheep on the Runway: A Comedy in Two Acts* (Samuel French, 1970), which premiered in New York in 1970, features a character described by its publisher as "an antidisestablishment columnist who smells red subversion round every corner."

Letter © the Trustees of the Isaiah Berlin Literary Trust, 2015.

on in Washington and which it was thought improper of his friends to see. However, like most of his other friends we went to it and rather enjoyed it; but it was a caricature (a visit to Vietnam by a paranoiac war correspondent throwing his weight around).

I have known Joe Alsop since 1940 and we were warm friends. Let me tell you what I think, as briefly as I can and as my secretary, who is typing this letter, will tolerate. When I first met him in 1940 and got to know him in 1941, he was a stout New Dealer, devoted to FDR, a friend of Felix Frankfurter, Philip Graham (a left New Dealer at that time) and his wife Kay, an admirer of Ben Cohen,³ a passionate interventionist (*The American White Paper*⁴ was a pamphlet in that direction); and these loyalties remained solid to the end of his life. He was totally fearless, independent, patriotic and a super Wasp—that he could not help being. His father,⁵ whom I knew, was exactly the same; so was his mother,⁶ Theodore Roosevelt's niece, a very nice and amusing woman. He was a warm-hearted and loyal friend, totally truthful, highly intelligent and very civilised—his knowledge of French literature, particularly Saint-Simon,⁷

³Benjamin Victor Cohen (1894–1983), graduate of Harvard Law School who became an important adviser in the Roosevelt and Truman administrations.

⁴Joseph Alsop and Robert Kintner, *American White Paper: The Story of American Diplomacy and the Second World War* (Simon and Schuster, 1940).

⁵Joseph Wright Alsop IV (1876–1953), gentleman (tobacco) farmer, sometime president of the New England Tobacco Growers' Association, and insurance executive from Avon, Connecticut; active in Republican politics, he served in his state legislature (House of Representatives 1907–1909, Senate 1909–1913), leading the Connecticut effort to elect Teddy Roosevelt in 1912; described by Arthur Schlesinger Jr. as "a Bull Moose Republican" in *A Life in the Twentieth Century: Innocent Beginnings, 1917–1950* (Houghton Mifflin, 2000), p. 379.

⁶Corinne Douglas Alsop (1886–1971), née Robinson, later (1956) Cole, cousin of both Eleanor Roosevelt and Alice Longworth; a leading Connecticut Republican, she served in the state legislature's House of Representatives 1925–1929, 1931–1933; "a frank and flaxsome lady" (*ibid.*).

⁷(Claude) Henri de Rouvroy, comte de Saint-Simon (1760–1825), French social theorist who sought, in response to industrialization, a more equitable reorganization of society, and profoundly influenced thinkers such as Comte and Marx. One of the six main subjects of Berlin's *Freedom and Its Betrayal: Six Enemies of Human Liberty*, edited by Henry Hardy (Princeton University Press, 2nd ed., 2014).

of Chinese political writings, of art, furniture, Greek history and God knows what else was pretty exceptional for an ordinary American political correspondent or columnist.

He was not at that period conspicuously right-wing, though of course he became it later. He did have an obsessive and somewhat apocalyptic vision of the conquest of the civilisation he believed in by barbarians from the East, i.e. the

for the most part, the drink—and certainly to some extent undone by his crypto-homosexuality, which he sought to conceal all his life, but which became more and more widely known, although he never knew the extent to which it was known....

His domestic habits and temperament were those of a rather headstrong eccentric British aristocrat. When he arrived to stay, he wanted the servants to

run around, and brought baskets of dirty laundry which had to be washed immediately, and longed to dress every night. If you had seen his room at Avon in Connecticut, and his father, the tobacco-growing squire, and his mother, and the ancestral portraits, you'd have seen where he came from. It certainly involved a high degree of straight social snobbery, but at least you could say it was absorbed at birth—the entire world in which he grew up was affected by it. Nevertheless, in spite of his fanatical anti-Communism, and the fact that he was virtually the first Cold Warrior, there were certain countervailing tendencies—to begin with, what you know already, his passionate concern with civil liberties, his resistance to McCarthyism, the fact that vari-

ous persons accused by McCarthy, people whom he disliked for their fellow-travelling views and suspected of dishonesty (sometimes legitimately), were nevertheless asked by him to stay with him in order that he might defend them. His most glorious hour was when he defended Henry Wallace, whom he politically detested, from the charge of being a Communist agent. He appeared before the committee, I think the McCarran,⁹ and testified—naturally the committee could do nothing with so rock-ribbed an anti-Communist as Joe Alsop, and at the end they said "Thank you, Mr Alsop, that will be quite sufficient," to which he replied "No, senator, it will not be sufficient...," and carried on for another half-hour, bawling at them.¹⁰ So the bawling was not reserved for social inferiors, fellow-travellers, feeble liberals, etc., but was

⁹Patrick Anthony ("Pat") McCarran (1876–1954), strongly anti-Communist Democrat senator, Nevada, 1933–1954; chair, 1950–1953, Senate Internal Security Subcommittee (SIS; "the McCarran Committee"), which had extensive powers to investigate alleged subversive activities in the US; Alsop appeared before the committee on October 18, 1951, in Wallace's defense.

¹⁰There is no record of such an exchange in the official transcript of the proceedings; an anecdote of this kind is told of various persons, including the inevitable Oscar Wilde, and seems to be a story that does the rounds without being properly sourced.



Joseph Alsop and Alexandra Schlesinger, New York City, early 1980s; photograph by Dominique Nabokov

Russians. The Chinese he admired so much that, even though they might conquer the world, he thought that that would be to America's disadvantage but not to that of the world. Russian Communism would mean total extinction of all values which he believed in (and in which I think I believe too).

With all this, he was bad-tempered, bibulous (as you say), could be a bully—but only towards people whom he suspected of opportunism, running with the tide, above all of holding views, whether in a weak and flexible way or in an obstinate and unyielding way, which he regarded as against the interests of the United States. Hence his dislike for Walter Lippmann (whom I knew well and who was indeed a twig that bent in the wind, honest, intelligent but of no character really, undone by his appalling embarrassment about his Jewish origins, which rattled like a skeleton in a half-opened cupboard); ditto my hero Stevenson, whom he regarded as a weakling, over-high-minded; Scotty Reston, for whom he had no moral or intellectual respect; but equally right-wingers like Arthur Krock,⁸ whom he despised as one of the vicious defenders of the extreme, slightly Fascist right. He was a deeply neurotic character, lonely, liable to periods of gloom and depression—hence,

⁸Arthur Bernard Krock (1886–1974), newspaper manager and Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist; Washington correspondent for *The New York Times*, 1932–1953.



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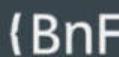
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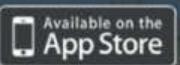
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special thanks to:

Ron Halpern
Judith Ginsberg
Thomas and Maarit Glocer
Scott and Laura Malkin
Azmi T. Mikati
Mel and Lois Tukman
Sue Ann Weinberg

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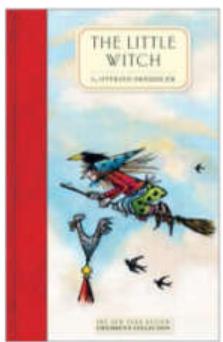
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THE LITTLE WATER SPRITE

Otfried Preussler

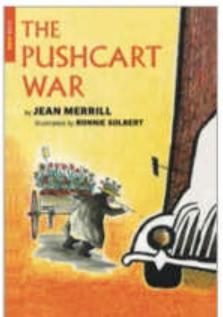
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sometimes directed against the grand and powerful.

He could not resist charm and intelligence. Naturally, he began by violently denouncing Bob Silvers. When they met, they became fast friends. He was a great friend of my friend Stuart Hampshire, who is a lifelong socialist and whose views coincided with Joe Alsop's at very few points. He became a friend of a man called Burdon-Muller, of whom I do not expect you to have heard (he was a rich, eccentric pro-Soviet who lived in Cambridge and Boston) as well as Franklin Roosevelt; and Ben Cohen, whom one cannot accuse of illiberal views—Joe thought him a saint and almost invariably right, though politically, of course, there were disagreements. He was friends, to my great indignation, with the horrible Lillian Hellman, who had praised his stance on civil liberties. But, of course, as time went on he became more and more reactionary, even though one could tease him about that and to some degree he laughed at himself for his lonely, rock-like attempt to stem the irresistible tide of vulgarity, decline in intellectual rigour, betrayal of the old civilisation, etc. which he perceived at Harvard, Washington and wherever.

...He was hideously unpopular among his fellow journalists always, partly because of the upper-class manner, grandeur, snobbery, ordering waiters about, demanding special treatment, etc. He was not one of the boys, ever, but a somewhat eccentric and often appallingly aggressive, bad-tempered shouter. I have been present at dinner parties in his house, attended, as always, by whoever was important in the administration of the day, plus personal friends, which ended in some kind of row—violent altercations between him and the equally conservative Charles Bohlen, frightful scenes with Dean Acheson, whom he rightly suspected of a certain lack of stoutness of character, despite his looking like the Laughing Cavalier, but who, of course, as against Joe, was almost invariably right. All this was very disagreeable, and his violent pro-Vietnam war line was a trifle mad. His attitude later was friendship and approval for those who had supported the war, even if they changed their mind afterwards, e.g. Robert McNamara, but who did not try to work his passage back by what he regarded as the methods used by e.g. Mac Bundy, whom he regarded as a miserable traitor. All this is true. His political attitudes were often dotty, unacceptable and even odious.

Now if you ask me why I remained such friends with him, let me say again: he was a man of incorruptible integrity; affectionate, loyal, civilised, a devoted friend—nothing said of someone, if he really was a friend, would shake his devotion. You could argue with him quite openly, denounce his views, and he remained courteous, inflexible. If ever there was a middle-of-the-road liberal, extreme left of the right, extreme right of the left, it is myself—yet our friendship never wavered. He knew perfectly well that I didn't like Eisenhower, that I was not all that pro-Kennedy (with whom he was virtually in love), that I thought Nixon and Reagan too awful—it made no difference to our relationship. He disliked Nixon, he was not a buddy of Reagan's, but voted for them, no doubt, and supported their policies, but was repelled by them, socially and personally;

he was not comfortable during the reign of Truman, whom I greatly admired.

He was a total original: the cruel bullying of which you speak did no doubt occur, and so did the drunkenness—if I had been there, even shivering in a corner, and said "Now, Joe, stop this, don't go on like this," I think he would have stopped. He prized friendship above almost everything—not above his patriotism, perhaps, but certainly everything else. Arthur Schlesinger's obituary of him was fundamentally just and generous¹¹: he basically did not care for Arthur, unlike everyone else—he seemed too far to the left (!)—but adored his second wife, who is the daughter of a lady¹² he once paid court to. So they remained on terms. Given this, Arthur's piece about him is very creditable indeed. But they were not friends personally in the way that Chip Bohlen, Philip Graham (who once told me that he had once meditated joining the Soviet Army as a volunteer against the Finns), Fritchey,¹³ Evangeline Bruce¹⁴ or Aline and I were friends. In the end, it was his private person, his warm heart, his honesty, courage and integrity, which no political combination or personal advantage, of whatever kind, ever affected in the smallest degree, that drew one to him. In the end, one simply likes people for what they are, not for this or that reason—I think Montaigne said that.¹⁵ The way people look, speak, the expressions on their faces, what one experiences when they enter a room—this is what determines one's fundamental feelings. He was a man on his own: his marriage was a disaster. He remained incurably solitary; his politics were more often than not deplorable—in personal conversation it became a joke—but you are right, in the kind of situations you describe he must have been often unspeakable.

I have done my best. I don't know if that explains anything, I only hope it does. Please give my love to both your parents.

Yours ever,
Isaiah

¹¹The article ("Joseph Alsop," obituary, *Independent*, August 31, 1989, p. 294) ended: "My wife and Aline Berlin called him two weeks ago from the Berlin eyrie in Paraggi. His voice sounded infinitely weak, but his spirit was, as always, indomitable. He embraced life, rejoiced in friends, laughed and raged at human folly, cherished human courage, was a civilised man, a gentleman and a patriot."

¹²Lily Dulany Cushing (1909–1969) of New York, artist whose works have been displayed in the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and are also held in private collections. She was the mother of Alexandra Schlesinger.

¹³Clayton Fritchey (1904–2001), US journalist and public servant; a syndicated columnist, he was press secretary to Adlai Stevenson in his 1952 and 1956 presidential campaigns, and subsequently Stevenson's director of public affairs, US mission, UN, 1961–1965.

¹⁴Evangeline Bruce (1914–1995), née Bell; in 1945 she married David Kirkpatrick Este Bruce (1898–1977), US diplomat, ambassador to UK 1961–1969; she was one of Isaiah Berlin's oldest friends from his wartime years in Washington.

¹⁵"If you press me to say why I loved him, I feel that the only explanation is to reply: 'Because it was he; because it was me.'" Michel de Montaigne, *Essays* 1. 28.

A New Vision of the Holocaust

Christopher R. Browning

Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning

by Timothy Snyder.

Tim Duggan Books, 462 pp., \$30.00

How does Timothy Snyder's *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* differ from previous histories of the Holocaust? Like many other historians, Snyder begins with a careful analysis of Hitler and his ideology, but he is not concerned with the broader, long-term context of German and European culture and the anti-Semitic tradition that provided the milieu in which Hitler's views found resonance. His geographical focus, as in his previous book *Bloodlands* (2010), is on Eastern Europe, rather than Germany. His political focus is first on East European diplomacy, then Soviet and Nazi policies of occupation and state destruction, rather than on Nazi decision-making and Jewish policy per se. The people at the center of his story are less often German perpetrators and Jewish victims and more often East European collaborators and various kinds of rescuers. And to a far greater extent than any other historians who have tackled this subject, Snyder is explicitly concerned with the lessons of the Holocaust and warnings for the future.

Snyder begins by setting out what he dubs "Hitler's portrait of a planetary ecosystem." Races were real, different, and unequal, and they competed in a zero-sum game for the planet's limited resources (land and food). For Germans to live and live well (what Snyder considers the two meanings of the word *Lebensraum*), others races—which at this particular time meant for Hitler the Slavs of Eastern Europe—had to be defeated, displaced, and decimated.

The Jews, on the other hand, were not another race competing in the zero-sum game for *Lebensraum* decreed by the law of nature, but a subhuman pestilence or unnatural nonrace that threatened nature at large and Germans in particular by spreading the ideas of ethics, conscience, and common humanity. Such ideas subverted every race's capacity to wage the inexorable, no-holds-barred racial struggle necessary for survival. The eternal Jewish conspiracy of humanitarianism and morality manifested itself in various pernicious forms throughout history, such as Christianity's "love thy neighbor." (To this one should add Liberalism's "equality before the law.") Above all Snyder focuses on Hitler's obsession (shared by many others) with the twentieth-century manifestation of the Jewish danger in the form of Judeo-Bolshevism.

For Snyder, therefore, Hitler's ultimate vision of an attack upon the Soviet Union would combine a "victorious colonial war against Slavs with a glorious anti-colonial struggle against the Jews." In this way "a single attack on a single state, the Soviet Union, could solve all the problems of the Germans at the same time," as Germany would both "win an empire and restore the planet." Then, illogically and unconvincingly in my opinion, Snyder argues for the temporal primacy of the anti-Slav war. "If the [colonial] war was won, Jews could be eliminated



A woman in the Jewish ghetto of Lodz, Poland, 1940–1944; from *Memory Unearthed: The Lodz Ghetto Photographs of Henryk Ross*, edited by Maia-Mari Sutnik, published by the Art Gallery of Ontario, and distributed by Yale University Press

as convenient. If Germans were somehow held back by inferior Slavs, then Jews would bear the consequence." I will return later to this interpretation of the immediate origins of the Final Solution as a reaction to or consolation prize for the failure of Operation Barbarossa.

The path that Hitler actually took to the attack upon the Soviet Union was not, however, the one he expected. Both Poland and Germany wanted to expand their territories. (Poland joined Nazi Germany in making demands upon Czechoslovakia in 1938—for the Sudetenland and Teschen respectively.) Both were anti-Communist. (Poland had fought a successful war against the Soviet Union between 1919 and 1921 and thereby had taken over former tsarist territories with Ukrainian and Byelorussian majorities.) And both wanted to be rid of their Jewish populations. The post-Pilsudski regime in Poland after 1935 had a goal of 90 percent Jewish emigration.

Thus Hitler presumed there was common ground for a joint German-Polish campaign against the Soviet Union. But Hitler did not understand that while Germany had a "recolonial" agenda, Poland was a "decolonial" power that owed its existence to the collapse of empires and the establishment of nation-states in Eastern Europe. Poland understood that it could survive as an independent nation-state only by preserving the status quo, and thus rejected Hitler's alliance offers that in-

evitably would have reduced Poland to the status of a subordinate satellite.

In what is perhaps the most unusual feature of a book on the Holocaust, Snyder devotes many pages to Poland, Zionism, and Palestine. He argues that Poland envisaged solving its own Jewish problem not through alliance with Nazi Germany but rather through promoting Revisionist Zionism. Through financing, training, and arming Betar—a paramilitary youth organization of the right-wing Revisionist Zionists—for a policy of resistance and terror against the British Mandate (in line with Poland's decolonial position), the Polish regime hoped for the creation of a Jewish state that would open up Palestine for large-scale Jewish emigration from Poland. The Irgun (led by Menachem Begin) and its fringe splinter group Lehi (led by Avraham Stern and Yitzhak Shamir)—the mainstays of the future Likud Party—cannot be understood outside their Polish origins, Snyder argues.

More controversial will be the parallel Snyder draws between Ukrainian nationalists and Lehi. Like "fringe" Ukrainian nationalists who hoped to obtain Ukrainian statehood through ties with Nazi Germany, Snyder argues, Lehi eventually succumbed to the temptation to sound out Nazi Germany on the possibility of cooperation based on their shared goal of getting Jews out of Europe and their shared "totalitarian" worldviews. It should be noted that while there is no record of a German reply to this pathetic and deluded feeler by Lehi, the Nazis' exploitation

of Ukrainian hopes for statehood was horrifically successful.

Following the final Polish rejection of his alliance offers in January 1939, Hitler resolved to attack Poland instead. To isolate Poland beforehand, Hitler took the occasion of his January 30 Reichstag speech to threaten those he presumed to be the Jewish wire-pullers controlling the major powers. Specifically, he warned that a new world war (as opposed to a local conflict between Germany and Poland) would result in the destruction of the Jewish race in Europe. Since these presumed Jewish wire-pullers had no existence outside Hitler's own imagination, his threat had no resonance.

His destruction of the remaining Czechoslovak state in March produced just the opposite effect in the form of a French and British guarantee to defend Poland. Hitler had to improvise the nonaggression pact of August 1939 with the Soviet Union, temporarily conceding a large swath of Eastern Europe to Stalin, with the result that the two dictatorships could unleash their mutual attack upon Poland and bring about its partition and destruction.

Snyder stipulates that "minorities depend the most on the protection of the state and upon the rule of law," and thus the fateful consequences of state destruction for the Jews of Europe is the major theme of his book. The Nazi destruction of Austria in 1938 provided a hint of things to come. The Nazis found large numbers of locals eager to carry out rituals of humiliation that confirmed the Jews' new helplessness, and the total expropriation and accelerated expulsion of Austrian Jews quickly followed.

With the extinction of the Polish state in 1939, "the true Nazi revolution had begun." Forcing the Jews into ghettos facilitated the theft of the Jewish property that Germans wanted, but it also gave a signal to impoverished Poles that they could steal whatever remained. The Germans created a situation that Snyder calls "relative deprivation," in which "Polish theft of Jewish property did not make Poles allies of the Germans, but it did make them seek to justify what they had done and tend to support any policy that kept the Jews from regaining what had been theirs." Moreover, the last surviving fragments of the Polish state—the local police and local administration—were "now unmoored from previous law and tradition" and made "responsible for the implementation of German racial policies."

If the German occupation and destruction of the state in western Poland "opened a realm of experimentation" ominous for the Jews, the "double occupation" and "double destruction of states" in eastern Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Bessarabia—first by the Soviet Union in 1939–1940 and then by Germany in 1941—was even more fateful. This region was, of course, the epicenter of Snyder's "bloodlands," where mass killing was concentrated. In his new book, it is the region where the Holocaust began, in large part because of the apt conditions that the Stalinist occupation created for the subsequent Nazi occupation to exploit. Psychologically,

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the Soviet occupation generated feelings of shame and resentment in Eastern Europeans. “Jews were never the majority of local collaborators” with the Soviets. They had “never held real power” in areas occupied by the Soviets, and in reality had “suffered as much or more than any other group under Soviet rule” from disproportionate confiscations and deportations. Yet the Jews necessarily saw the Soviets as “the lesser evil” and this made them “collectively vulnerable” for acts of revenge.

Economically, the Soviet seizure of all private property left Jewish property in particular up for grabs when the Germans arrived. Politically, pervasive local collaboration by non-Jews with the Soviet authorities could be erased by an act of “double collaboration.” That is, the German collaborative offer was that local populations could cleanse their own past by cleansing their communities of the Jews.

The murder of the Jews was thus, Snyder writes, a “joint creation” of “the greater evil,” the basis for which was laid in three stages. First, the rituals of humiliation and degradation of Jews by the local populations were “a political scenography by which the local population performed Nazi ideology,” publicly defining communism as Jewish and thereby exonerating themselves from their own behavior under Soviet occupation. Second, pogroms that were “anything but a spontaneous reaction” were instigated by Germans with the help of local ex-Communists and former Soviet collaborators who provided themselves with “the perfect escape route” to purge themselves of the stain of their previous collaboration by killing Jews.

Third, while the Germans came “to understand that pogroms were not an effective way to eliminate Jews,” they were “an appropriate way to find murderers who could be recruited for organized actions.” The Arajs Commando in Latvia, an auxiliary police force, became the most notorious example of many such local units, killing or assisting in the killing of 40,000 of the country’s 66,000 Jews.

While Snyder pays attention to differences among eastern Poland, western and eastern Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and German-occupied Russian territory, he makes several crucial generalizations. First, he writes that indigenous anti-Semitism did not correlate with local killing. The fatality rates in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, where the anti-Semitic tradition was weak, were just as high as in eastern Poland or the western Ukraine, where it was strong.

Second, collaboration in mass killing of Jews may have begun in the zone of double occupation, but it was not restricted to the borderland nationalities living there. “The Germans were aided in their campaign of murder by members of all Soviet nationalities they encountered,” for everywhere the Germans encountered a local appetite for Jewish property and above all the need to cleanse a Soviet past. “The politics of the greater evil meant proclaiming the destruction of Jewish communism while arranging for communists to kill Jews.”

This phenomenon of double collaboration, therefore, “was the rule rather than the exception.” If in *Bloodlands* the local populations in much of Eastern Europe seemed like rather passive figures struggling to survive between the millstones of Hitler and Stalin, in *Black Earth* their agency and agendas have been restored.

In my opinion this stark picture needs to be qualified in several ways. First, not all rituals of humiliation were a “political scenography” that “performed Nazi ideology.” In some rural areas of Lithuania, for instance, local rituals of humiliation featured older Christian anti-Jewish motives, indicating a more complex situation in which the successive arrival of the Soviets and the Nazis rendered older tensions and divisions lethal for the first time, but local populations did not entirely lose their own voices.*

Second, the possibility of erasing a Soviet past may have been an important aspect in Nazi recruitment (as suggested also by the historian and sociologist Jan Gross), but it was not the only one. The earliest recruits to the Arajs Commando, for instance, were Viktor Arajs’s fraternity brothers and friends as well as teenagers from families victimized by the Soviet deportations. Subsequently the Arajs group recruited from all ranks of society. And in the two trials of Ukrainian collaborators for which I served as a historical expert witness, neither defendant had served the Soviets first. Here Snyder has mistaken the part for the whole.

Unlike many historians, Snyder does not give much attention to the twists and turns of Nazi decision- and policy-making. He rightly points out that into the spring of 1942, the Nazis had starved far more Slavs—especially in the POW camps—than they had shot Jews. But I think he is incorrect in arguing that the faltering campaign on the eastern front and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, presenting Germany with a prolonged world war, “allowed” Hitler to “slip” from a colonial war to a war for the planetary annihilation of the Jews. In this view, argued most articulately by Christian Gerlach, the Final Solution was the product of Nazi military failure and frustration, dating to Pearl Harbor and the Red Army counterattack defending Moscow in December 1941. I have argued, in contrast, that the key tipping point toward the Final Solution occurred in the setting of premature euphoria about their likely victory among the Nazi leaders, dating to the previous September and October.

During these two fateful months, when the Germans experienced an unbroken string of military successes that raised the prospect once again of imminent victory, a cluster of ominous developments took place. The Nazis experimented with three methods of mass killing by poison gas (carbon monoxide in either sealed trucks or sealed huts and the fumigant Zyklon B). A number of places were considered as sites for using poison gas, and three were initially selected at Belzec (where camp construction began on November 1), Chelmno, and Mogilev (the crematoria ovens ordered for that camp were eventually shipped to Birkenau instead).

Hitler reversed his previous position and approved the deportation of Jews from the Third Reich to Eastern Europe, which began on October 15. On October 23, Adolf Eichmann met with his “Jewish experts” in Berlin, and one

*See T. Fielder Valone, “Destroying the Ties That Bind: Rituals of Humiliation and the Holocaust in Provincial Lithuania,” *Traces: The UNC-Chapel Hill Journal of History*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 2012). Additional footnotes appear in the Web version of this article at www.nybooks.com.

attendee immediately informed a friend that “in the near future many of the Jewish vermin will be exterminated through special measures.” A Spanish government request to remove Spanish Jews from German-occupied France to Spanish Morocco was rejected on the grounds that “these Jews would also be too much out of the direct reach of the measures for a basic solution to the Jewish Question.” On October 23, 1941, all further Jewish emigration was forbidden, reversing the previous policy of trying to expel Jews from the Third Reich by whatever path. And frustrated German authorities in Serbia were assured that the Jewish women and children left behind after the army shot all the male Jews would not be a permanent burden, for

as soon as the technical possibility exists within the framework of a total solution to the Jewish question, the Jews will be deported... to the reception camps in the east.

Hitler himself was unusually unguarded in statements made in the third week of October. To Fritz Sauckel and Fritz Todt, both high officials, he noted that the native populations in the east would be treated “as Indians” and “sifted,” while “we are getting rid of the destructive Jews entirely.” And to Himmler, just returned from announcing plans for the construction of gas chambers at Mogilev, he proclaimed; “It is good when the terror precedes us that we are exterminating the Jews.” In short, I would argue that by late October 1941 a vision had already crystallized for deporting all European Jews (even Spanish Jews in France and Jewish women and children in Belgrade) to camps in the east and exterminating them “through special measures”—that is, poison gas.

Such an interpretation is both more in accord with the evidence and more consistent with Snyder’s own portrayal of Hitler’s views on the Jews’ role in history. It is also in line with the pattern of past behavior, when Nazi Jewish policy was radicalized at successive peaks of victory. In September 1939, once he was sure that Stalin had kept his commitment and the French had stayed put behind the Maginot Line, Hitler approved a drastic demographic reordering of Poland, including the ethnic cleansing of Polish and German Jews, who were to be expelled to the Lublin Reservation. In late May 1940, with the best units of the Allied armies trapped on the beaches of Dunkirk and the fall of France in sight, Hitler approved the Madagascar Plan for the expulsion of all Jews from Europe. In mid-July 1941, when the collapse of the Soviet Union seemed imminent, the *Einsatzgruppen* were reinforced by a dozen police battalions and two SS brigades, and the formation of native auxiliary police units was approved. By August, large-scale massacres that now also targeted Jewish women and children had begun.

The systematic mass murder of Soviet Jewry by the Nazis was underway. And in October 1941, flush with the encirclement of Leningrad, the capture of Kiev, and the breakthrough on the central front at Vyazma and Bryansk, Hitler extended the Final Solution to the rest of European Jewry, to be accomplished through deportation eastward to camps that were to be built and equipped with poison gas facilities. The

Final Solution was not Hitler's consolation prize for military disappointment; it was yet another radicalization of Nazi Jewish policy spurred by mistaken victory euphoria.

Beyond Eastern Europe Snyder's treatment is much briefer and focused on three points. The first is the "Auschwitz paradox." Though Auschwitz has become the most prominent and "convenient" symbol of the Holocaust, paradoxically more than half the Jews the Nazis intended to be murdered there survived, because they never boarded a train to take them there. Second, they avoided deportation, Snyder writes, because in these regions state destruction

ern bureaucracy in Nazi hands, Snyder is offering a consciously contrarian view when he argues that it was not bureaucracy but the "removal of bureaucracy" or deportation of Jews to "bureaucracy-free zones in the East" that was fatal. This strikes me as a false dichotomy, in that it was a bureaucratically empowered Nazi state that destroyed other states, stripped Jews of their citizenship and other rights, organized the deportations, and staffed the stateless zones where the killing took place.

One of the most unusual features of *Black Earth* is Snyder's devoting no fewer than three chapters (some 20

over the Germans. For Snyder, "rescue was usually grey."

Many people have a notorious record of selectively remembering and forgetting the past, of appropriating and distorting history, and thereby using and abusing history for their own purposes. Any attempt to draw lessons and to issue "warnings" from any historical event is a perilous venture. In view of this record, such lessons and warnings drawn from history usually are more revealing of the mind and current agenda of the admonisher than a sober and objective reflection about the past. The temptation to exploit the moral authority of the Holocaust or the stigmatizing power of an analogy with Nazism makes these topics particularly susceptible to moralizing. In popular culture there is even a term—"Godwin's law"—for the near inevitability that virtually any online argument will eventually lead to the use of an analogy involving Nazis or Hitler. Given the difficulties of deducing warnings from the Holocaust, how does Snyder's bold venture onto this terrain fare?

Snyder notes that in the postwar period of the Green Revolution, the world enjoyed a brief respite from food scarcity and experienced a growing stability of states providing the protection of citizenship. In such a historical setting, the world of Hitler can seem distant and even irrelevant. But with the waning of the Green Revolution and the rising threat to food, water, and inhabitable land posed by climate change, Snyder envisages numerous possible scenarios of catastrophe around the world that could make Hitler's worldview of struggle for survival in a zero-sum ecosystem relevant again.

Most interesting in my opinion is his assertion that serious misunderstandings "underlay an American myth of the Holocaust," above all that it was the product of the "overweening" and "all-powerful" state, so that "the weakening of state authority appears salutary." Snyder dismisses both the left-wing version of this myth (the overweening state as an expression of modern society, Enlightenment hubris, and the drive for practical mastery) and the right-wing version (the regulatory, welfare state as inherently tyrannical). In contrast, he argues, "the state is for the recognition, endorsement, and protection of rights," and the Holocaust was made possible by the destruction of states. He advocates for a liberal, pluralistic society as well as for science unfettered by politicalization and denial in order to deal with climate change, propositions with which I readily agree.

But I think his view of the state again needs qualification. While the preservation of rights may require an effective state, it is not always the case that the state protects its citizens' rights. It is no myth that the destruction of states and rights in Europe, and of the lives of European Jews, was indeed carried out by an "overweening" state, Nazi Germany. To dismiss it as a "mutation" of a state, as does Snyder, is simply a semantic dodge. What is crucial here is the preservation of states that maintain political cultures based on human rights, democratic political processes, and constitutional limitations, not the preservation of states for their own sake. That is a proposition sensibly advocated long before the Holocaust. □



*Tzal Nusymovych, a Jewish Ukrainian in his nineties who fought at the Battle of Stalingrad and later returned to live in the house that his family had fled in 1941, Korsun, Cherkaska District, Ukraine, 2012; photograph by Stephen Shore from his book *Survivors in Ukraine*, to be published this month by Phaidon, with an introduction by Jane Kramer*

was not complete, unlike in Eastern Europe. Dependent satellites (Slovakia, Croatia), conquered states (France, Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Yugoslavia, and Greece), and allied states (Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania) all retained varying degrees of sovereignty that shielded Jews to some extent from unfettered German power (although the Romanians and Croatians eliminated many Jews on their own). Third, the aspects of sovereignty that protected Jews were both the capacity to make foreign policy and the preservation of citizenship and bureaucracy.

Much of this is in line with the consensus of Holocaust historiography, particularly that Jewish fatality rates correlated most closely with the degree of German power and control and expectation of German victory, and correlated only imperfectly with degrees of indigenous anti-Semitism. However, because scholars from Raul Hilberg and H. G. Adler to Zygmunt Baumann have emphasized the lethality of mod-

percent of the text) to aspects of Holocaust rescue. In fact, while he sketches out the spectrum of people and institutions involved and the variety of ways in which they sometimes saved lives, these chapters more often convey complexities and ambiguities rather than uplifting and hagiographic tales of exemplary altruism.

In Snyder's telling, for instance, the Japanese consul in Kaunas, Lithuania, Chiune Sugihara, worked with Polish agents to create a Japanese transit visa scheme to rescue endangered Poles who had fled to Lithuania. In practice two thirds of those who used this visa scheme turned out to be Polish Jews, thanks to Sugihara, though that had not been the original purpose of the Poles who helped devise the scheme.

In another instance Izrael Piñczuk saved himself by joining the Soviet partisans, but then had to recruit local Ukrainians who had previously robbed and killed Jews. The priority of the Soviet partisans was neither Jewish rescue nor Holocaust justice but victory

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Who Can Find the True West?

Ian Frazier

The Oregon Trail: A New American Journey

by Rinker Buck.

Simon and Schuster, 450 pp., \$28.00

A few years ago I discovered that I am what is called a “rut nut.” I had known for a long time that the ruts of long-abandoned trails and historic highways fascinate me. In western North Dakota, at the grassy, overgrown rise where Fort Union, a fur-trading fort near the confluence of the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers, used to stand, I had walked the rut of the short trail that once led from the vanished fort’s front gate down to the former shoreline where the steamboats had docked. That short rut excited my imagination more than the whole immense reconstructed fort that later went up (erasing the rut) on the site.

In Siberia I found horizon-reaching ruts of the ancient Sibirskii Trakt and saw in my mind the shackled exiles and imperial couriers and Chinese tea caravans that had once passed by. And in Wichita, Kansas, some friends had shown me sites on the old Santa Fe Trail, regretting that a good set of trail ruts outside of town were now off-limits because the rancher who owned the property had grown tired of the “rut nuts” leaving his fence gates open. Hearing the term for the first time I knew it meant me.

Rinker Buck, the author of four previous books of non-fiction, is a rut nut of the first order who has taken that particular passion about as far as one can. In his excellent new book, *The Oregon Trail: A New American Journey*, he goes from daydreaming about some ruts he happens upon in Kansas to buying a covered wagon and three mules and traveling the trail from Missouri to Oregon. In certain less-populated parts of the West, hundreds of miles of the original Oregon Trail still remain more or less as the emigrant wagon trains of the nineteenth century left them. Rinker and his brother, Nick, accomplished the first wagon journey over the trail since 1910 when Ezra Meeker, an advocate of its preservation and historical recognition, performed the feat with an ox-drawn wagon.

Books of this kind follow a rule of nonfiction, perhaps the most basic of all: Do it, then write about it. If what you achieve is daunting and difficult and remarkable and maybe also dangerous enough, the book you write will be mostly written in the doing. Conquer Gaul; then, if you say, “All Gaul is divided into three parts,” you’ve earned the generalization. Rinker and Nick Buck’s conquest of the trail, the achievement of a lifetime, makes for a real nonfiction thriller, an account that keeps you turning the pages because you can’t conceive how the protagonists will make it through the enormous real-life obstacles confronting them. Whether this enterprise would succeed was in doubt in Buck’s mind,

and justifiably so, at several points along the way.

I don’t know whether America still faces west, but it used to. Pressures on the population—financial panics, the growth of cities, scarcity of unclaimed farmland—regularly put whole counties and districts into westward motion. In the early 1840s emigrants from the East bound for Oregon began to use a trail that led from points in Missouri to the Platte River, then along that valley to the Rocky Mountains, which

wagon. The family expedition got attention, including a photo feature in *Look* magazine. That 1958 covered-wagon trip is the deep foundation for the Buck brothers’ transcontinental journey. As reenactors, mule handlers, and intrepid adventurers the sons do the father proud.

Buck’s discussion of the necessities in the construction of a trailworthy wagon—not a show wagon, for short and easy sections of the trail or for parade jaunts during rodeos—preserves important information only a few others still know. In Jamesport, Missouri,

sometimes chaotic life and is laid up with an injured foot before the journey begins. Rinker’s marriage has ended, and he has left his job at the *Hartford Courant*, which he says has been turned into a crummy paper by a billionaire owner. (In an earlier book, *Shane Comes Home*, about the first US casualty in the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Buck thanks the *Courant* for the patience and guidance its editors gave him in writing the piece that became the book.) Nick, the mule driver, is less educated than Rinker, who is more the worrier and organizer. Early on, Nick

tells his brother that he will call him “Boss,” and he wants to be called “Trail Hand.” This assignment of rank holds throughout and keeps things clear between them. That they stayed friends during the hard journey and after shows how emotionally wise the brothers are in their later middle age.

This is the second book that Buck has written about an amazing cross-country journey with one of his brothers. In 1966, when Rinker was fifteen and his older brother, Kernahan, was seventeen, they flew across the country in a Piper Cub they had restored themselves. That trip became the subject of Buck’s first book, *Flight of Passage*, a memoir published in 1997. Tom Buck, their father, had been a daredevil barnstorming pilot in his younger days and he features prominently in *Flight of Passage*. The emotion Rinker expends in talking about his father in that book clears the slate for this one, allowing him to concentrate more on the here-and-now of the trail. The earlier trip may also have helped him in knowing how to work with and write about a family member.

Anyone who wants to report on the modern-day West has to spend a lot of time in cars and motels. Buck’s means of transport removes him from that constraint and allows, at four miles an hour, a fine-grained view of the country. As the wagon travels county roads in places where the actual old ruts aren’t available, people in the houses it passes come out to chat and to feed apples to the mules. Buck notices that many of the family groups consist of grandparents and grandchildren, and he soon realizes that he’s seeing up-close the result of rural America’s crystal meth epidemic, which has landed the kids’ parents in rehab centers or jail.

Others who take interest in the wagon’s progress are trail aficionados like Bill Petersen of Minden, Nebraska, president of the Nebraska chapter of the Oregon-California Trails Association, who began acquiring his expertise when he took the OCTA’s Rut-Swale Identification Certification Course (ruts are the tracks clearly cut by wagon wheels; swales are the wider, more deeply eroded swaths through which people traveled; that there even is such a thing as a Rut-Swale Identification Certification Course will be



Jackson Pollock: Going West, 1934–1935

their wagons could cross at South Pass, the easiest route over the Continental Divide, near present-day Lander, Wyoming. During subsequent decades thousands of wagons followed that route every year, sometimes branching off and making roughly parallel trails. On the other side of the Rockies the Oregon Trail joined the Snake River valley, which it followed toward the Columbia River, whose valley took it almost to the Pacific coast. The Oregon Trail continued to be used even after the railroad spanned the country in the late 1860s on tracks that sometimes covered parts of the trail. Interstate Highway 80 occupies parts of the former trail today.

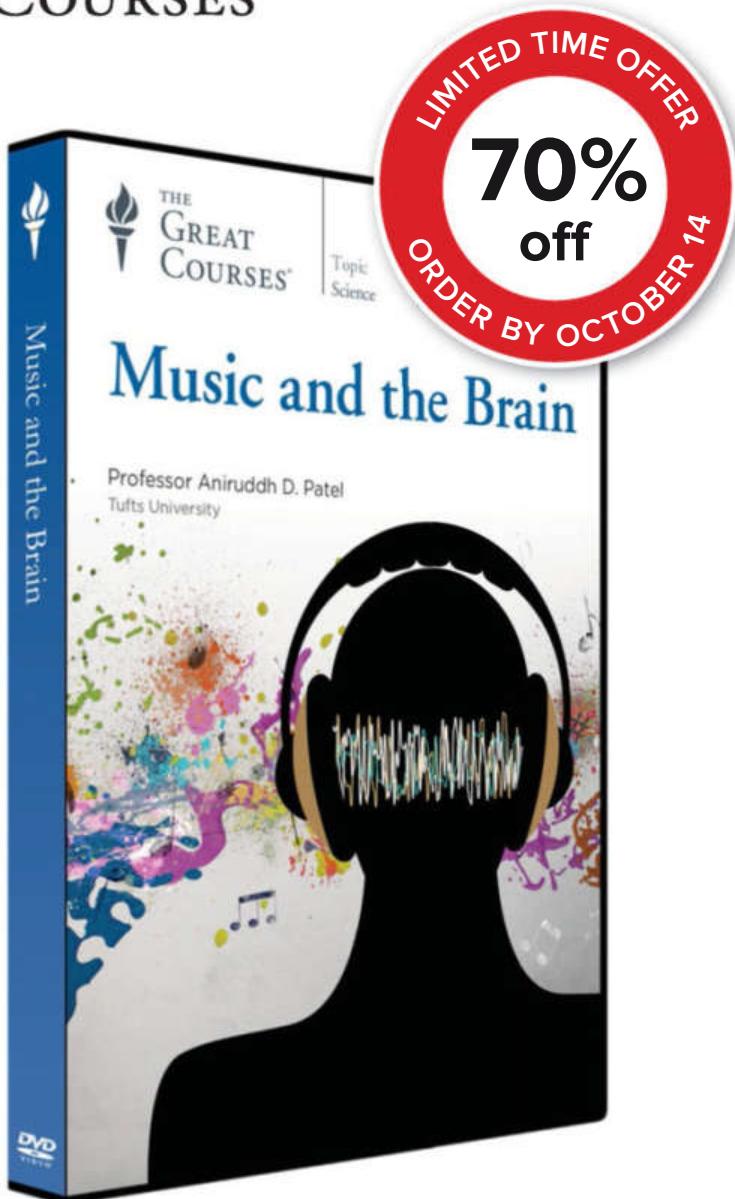
In the Ohio town where I grew up, most kids I knew left it, and most went west. It still seems to me the more sensible direction to go. Going east seemed like working backwards. Many TV shows in our childhood were about the West. *Gunsmoke*, set in Dodge City, Kansas, during the years of the open range, survived to be the longest-running series of the day. The show Rinker Buck especially remembers was *Wagon Train*, about a covered-wagon caravan across the plains.

He thinks that show may have influenced his father, Tom Buck, an eccentric magazine executive and writer, to take Rinker and his siblings on a trip in 1958 from their New Jersey farm through rural Pennsylvania by covered

Buck spends a day in an Amish wagon expert’s shop fashioning a “tongue-reliever,” a long-forgotten modification that keeps the weight of the wagon tongue off the draft animals’ shoulders. It involves a chain and a spring. No wagons go such long distances anymore—e.g., to Oregon—so that kind of accumulated fatigue is not a problem.

Even better is the information about mules. I had not known that George Washington was the nation’s premier mule breeder, responsible for the introduction of the larger and stronger mules derived partly from Spanish stock that spread eventually all over the frontier. Buck chooses mules of that heritage rather than easier-to-manage oxen because mules are faster and will allow him to keep to the schedule he has worked out. The three he buys, Jake, Bute, and Beck, become as much a part of the journey as the two brothers and make this an animal story as well. The exquisite control required to handle a three-mule team as it pulls several tons of wagon through all kinds of circumstances takes experience and skill possessed by almost nobody. That’s where Nick Buck comes in. He happens to be one of the best mule drivers in the country, winner of prizes in the art, and his brother knows that he will need him for the journey.

Neither of the brothers is a young man. Both have been through a lot. Nick has had an unconventional and



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welcome news to less-schooled rut nuts like me). Petersen has erected his own trail markers along the Platte and is eager to share his knowledge with Buck. The wide, shallow Platte and its soggy margins provided the perfect habitat for the bacteria of Asiatic cholera, and many emigrants died from the disease on that part of the trail. Buck refers to emigrant journals for descriptions of the disaster that cholera often wrought, and he finds graves, aided by a book called *Graves and Sites on the Oregon and California Trails*, coauthored by Randy Brown, another local expert who visits the expedition.

When the Bucks reach such famous dicey places as the crossing of the Big Blue River or the south-bank-to-north-bank crossing of the Platte, one can picture a ghostly audience of old-time travelers watching and wondering how they will handle them. They go over the Big Blue on a bridge, though the mules don't like the junction plates linking the road with the bridge structure and must be coaxed across. When the wagon gets to California Hill, the first steep ascent in western Nebraska, Rinker wants to go around but Nick takes it head-on. The trail is so precipitous and the likelihood of falling so present that Olive Oyl, Nick's dog, cowers under the wagon seat in terror.

They don't cross the Platte until Casper, Wyoming, and again use a bridge. In that state they meet Mormons who are on pilgrimage retreats along the trail where their church has identified holy sites as a part of the founding story of Salt Lake City. Buck states his conviction that all religions, including the Roman Catholicism he was brought up in, are equally nonsensical. He objects to the Mormons' influence on certain sections of the trail as a violation of the separation of church and state that an overly compliant Park Service has gone along with. The sight of thousands of Mormon youth encamped in parks along the trail alarms him.

But when the wagon reaches its most difficult ridge crossing yet, the Bucks meet a young Mormon couple, Sam and LaVora, who are hiking the ridge and looking for a spiritual sense of what their pioneer ancestors endured. The couple offer their help. The wagon starts up the incline, "axle by axle," the mules focused and intent. Positioned as instructed by the driver, Sam and LaVora stand at the switchback turns to give him targets to aim for. When the wheels stick at big rocks, the two help the wheels over. Finally the Bucks are at the top, exhilarated. Rinker says those must've been Mormon angels who guided them. Nick says, "Well, I happen to believe in all that shit. Those people were angels. You don't have to be some Bible-whackin' birdbrain from Alabama to believe in angels."

Buck's is not the first book to be called *The Oregon Trail*. That well-known classic, written by the historian Francis Parkman in the late 1840s, describes his western journey of 1846. Parkman did not travel on the trail past Fort Laramie, east of the Rockies in present-day Wyoming, and his book concentrates instead on the weeks he spent living with a band of Oglala Sioux in and near the Black Hills. Travel along the trail does not figure prominently in Parkman's account. Compared to Buck—I

turned from one to the other as I reread them both—Parkman does not shine as a human being. Though it may be hard to picture the Harvard-educated Boston Brahmin as a wild kid, Parkman was in fact almost that on his journey, made when he was twenty-three. He has the swift, violent opinions of youth, often describes people he encounters as "repulsive," shoots buffalo right and left, leaves them to rot, and so on. His views of Indians are generally as contemptuous and cruel as one might expect for his time, or even more so.

Buck says he loves "crazyass passion," but as he travels the trail he comes off as the opposite of wild. A sane grownup, he judges and acts with caution, deliberates, puts himself in other people's shoes. One of the main subjects that he has written about is

ancient claw-footed tables, well waxed and rubbed." Only he would notice that heartbreaking hand-polished gleam. He travels with his friend and cousin Quincy Adams Shaw, but he knows Shaw's measure, and when his companion hesitates to join him on his search for an Oglala village Parkman does not blink. Instead, with a possibly untrustworthy French-Canadian guide, Parkman goes off on his own, despite also suffering from a case of dysentery so severe he can barely ride and fears he will die. He wants to find an Indian village so he will be able to write with more authority about Indians in his contemplated history of France and England in the New World.

Wobbling and ill on a horse that's also sick, he somehow finds the village, lives in the teepee of a leading Oglala

mountains while pregnant and had a healthy baby in Oregon the next spring, he doesn't mention Sacagawea, westward exploration's most famous new mother, who gave birth two months before setting out with Lewis and Clark (thirty-one years before Narcissa Whitman) and carried her infant with her across similar terrain. Buck tells us that "Black Hills" was a common geographic term "formally assigned" to that feature, presumably by white people; the Sioux say the hills had that name long before white people came. And his characterization of the Powder River War of the mid-1860s as ending in an Indian defeat is wrong. Under the leadership of Chief Red Cloud, the Sioux and Cheyenne beat the army decisively in that war.

He does, however, include the fate of Narcissa Whitman, whose mission to the Cayuse Indians failed but whose commercial enterprises with her husband in Oregon succeeded, bringing more settlers, thus angering the Cayuse, who eventually killed her and her husband and children. Subsequent acts of ruthlessness toward Indians would be explained by politicians and generals, over and over, as having been justified by what happened to the Whitmans.

The pivotal moment in Parkman's book occurs when he leaves Shaw to search for the Oglala. In Buck's, the crisis is similar but the result is the reverse. Nick, who had planned to leave the journey and go back to Maine for a theatrical production he promised to be in, decides instead to stay with his brother and see the journey through. Rinker's gratitude for this act of generosity is extreme and touching. He knows that without Nick he would have no trip, and no book. Parkman is on a young man's brave and heedless adventure into something that nobody like himself has ever experienced before. Buck's adventure is more inward—a deepening of his understanding of himself and of his brother, and also of the mules, whose complicated minds he is eventually almost able to read.

It's not a spoiler to reveal that the brothers get to Oregon; the title tips us off to that. When they finally do part, Buck describes the scene:

Nick was fidgeting with his fingers, drumming them on the Toyota steering wheel.

"Oh, fuck, Rinker. I hate saying good-bye to you. Can I just say that I'll never forget this trip? I mean, I'll always be the guy that drove team all the way across the Oregon Trail. Thank you. Ah, shit, I don't even know what I'm sayin here. What am I sayin here? Thank you, Rinker. I would be dead right now if I was home in Maine and you hadn't let me come along."

My heart was skipping with roller-coaster emotions and I could feel my eyes fill with moisture. I hated it when Nick ignored his own contribution and heaped all of the praise on me.

"Nick. I'm going to say just one thing. You stayed with me at Shickley. I'll never forget that and I couldn't have crossed the trail without you."

Rinker Buck has written an *Oregon Trail* that can be read alongside Francis Parkman's, and that is saying a lot. □



'Buffalo bull, grazing'; from George Catlin's North American Indian Portfolio, 1845

community. An earlier book, *First Job*, described the group of dedicated newspaper people he worked with on *The Berkshire Eagle*. His book about the young soldier killed in Iraq explored in detail the coming together of Marines, family members, and townspeople as they honor the death. In the reporting, Buck became another of the mourners; age and life experience have bolstered his crazyass passion with patience, social skills, empathy.

Riding in an antique and picturesque vehicle, as he does, sometimes becomes a performance. Everybody wants to see the guys in the covered wagon. Luckily, Nick is good at obliging the curious with stories and songs. The emigrant wagon trains had lots of hands to move the wagons through rough places; the Bucks' wagon, though solitary, is hardly alone. All along the way people bring food for them and their mules and provide the brothers with places to camp and showers and rides to repair broken equipment. They are welcomed almost everywhere they go. The scene with the Mormon couple stands out because Mormons are the only folks about whom the author expresses some reservations. And then Sam and LaVora prove to be helpful allies, even angels.

Why, given Parkman's much less agreeable personality, is his book great? For starters, nobody could depict the West in its vastness and its tiny details better than he. Many accounts tell of the items of furniture that proved too much for the emigrants to carry and ended up being dumped by the side of the trail. Here is Parkman: "One may sometimes see the shattered wrecks of

called the Big Crow, recuperates, goes on buffalo hunts, observes the Oglalas' daily life—all this in 1846, two decades before the relations of the Plains Sioux with the whites deteriorated to open warfare. When Parkman saw the Oglala, the man who would become the greatest of the tribe, Crazy Horse, was still a boy. War parties that planned to go against the Snakes during that summer did not materialize and Parkman was disappointed that he never got to accompany Indians at war; but then again, neither did any other white historian.

As emigrant traffic on the Oregon Trail grew, the highway tore through Plains Indian life. The buffalo became scarce along the trail and in time divided into northern and southern herds, and tribes like the Arapaho and the Cheyenne also split into northern and southern branches. When the government set up reservations for Plains tribes it was careful to put them far to the north and south of the trail route, which had become the country's main east-west avenue. The Union Pacific Railroad had followed that route, and the generals wanted to keep the Indians well away from the railroad. Today no Indian reservations are near the old trail, so it's not surprising that Buck meets no Indians on his journey.

Indians figure in his account at the periphery, sometimes out of focus or only by omission. That is, he is weak on Indians. When he describes the admirable accomplishment of Narcissa Whitman, missionary wife of missionary Marcus Whitman, who crossed the plains and

*When we spend time with elephants
we come away somehow better.*

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What Philosophers Really Know

Rebecca Newberger Goldstein

Philosophy of Language: The Classics Explained
by Colin McGinn.
MIT Press, 225 pp., \$35.00

Academic philosophy often draws ire. The complaints are twofold and not altogether consistent with each other.

The first is that philosophers can't seem to agree on anything, with dissension descending to such basic questions as the nature of the field itself, both its subject matter and its methodology. The lack of unanimity implies a lack of objectivity and suggests that any hope for progress is futile. This complaint often comes from scientists and culminates in the charge that there is no such thing as philosophical expertise. Who then are these people employed in philosophy departments, and what entitles them to express subjective viewpoints with the pretensions of impersonal knowledge?

The second complaint is that academic philosophy has become inaccessible. For more than a century now, the kind of philosophy practiced in most philosophy departments, at least in the English-speaking world, is analytic philosophy, and analytic philosophy, or so goes the lament, is too technical, generating vocabularies and theories aimed at questions remote from problems that outsiders consider philosophical. Here the complaint is that there *are* philosophical experts and that, in carrying the field forward, they have excluded the nonprofessional. The suppressed premise is that philosophical questions are of concern to all of humanity and therefore ought to remain within reach of all of humanity.

Analytic philosophy originated with philosophers who also did seminal work in mathematical logic, most notably Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell, and the alliances with both formal logic and science are among its defining features. As such, analytic philosophy values conceptual clarity and argumentative precision, its techniques are developed in their service, and it condemns the turgid language (and, perhaps not coincidentally, the indifference or hostility to science) characteristic of what many people think of as philosophy. Hegelian idealism was the prototype of what early analytic philosophers thought philosophy should not be, and today such thinkers as Martin Heidegger and Slavoj Žižek have stepped into that role.

Philosophy of language has been, from the beginning, close to the center of analytic philosophy, and Colin McGinn's *Philosophy of Language: The Classics Explained* plunges one into philosophy as it is actually practiced by a majority of Anglo-American philosophers. Anyone who is put off by philosophy's technical turn might be ill-disposed toward McGinn's book. But I hope this pell-mell exposition of some of analytic philosophy's most technical achievements will persuade the persuadable that philosophers really have something to be expert about and that, with an able guide and a bit of intellectual effort, thoughtful people can profit from their work.

McGinn himself makes humbler claims for his book, the fruit of thirty-

eight years of teaching philosophy of language. He writes that students tend to have enormous difficulty understanding its foundational texts. He will therefore explain these texts, assuming no previous familiarity. He hopes his efforts will be useful not just to students but to their professors, saving the latter "arduous exegesis." Ten texts are explained, though they are not reproduced here; the book is meant to accompany a standard anthology.

The texts, beginning with Gotlob Frege's 1892 article "On Sense and Reference," are classics indeed, meaning that anyone wishing to know modern philosophy of language must have mastered them. And they are undeniably difficult. McGinn's painstaking efforts at unpacking them will surely be, as he hopes, a boon in the classroom. But McGinn is too modest in his aims. I would offer *Philosophy of Language* as a challenge both to those who think that there is no such thing as philosophical expertise and to those who think there ought not to be. Both biases are refuted by what has been accomplished in the years since Frege's article first set philosophy of language on its modern track.

What exactly is this modern track? What, to be more blunt, is philosophy of language trying to accomplish? McGinn addresses this blunt question bluntly:

The most general thing we can say is that philosophy of language is concerned with the general nature of meaning. But this is not very helpful to the novice, so let us be more specific. Language is about the world—we use it to communicate about things. So we must ask what this "aboutness" is: what is it and how does it work? That is, how does language manage to hook up with reality? How do we refer to things, and is referring to things all that language does? Further, is referring determined by what is in the mind of the referrer? If not, what else might determine reference? Some parts of language we call "names," but is everything in language a name? How is a word referring to something connected to a person referring to something? Do expressions like "Tom Jones," "the father of Shakespeare," and "that dog" all refer in the same way?

In what way do these types of expressions differ in meaning? How is a sentence related to its meaning? Is the meaning the same as the sentence or is it something more abstract? Can't different sentences express the same meaning? What is a meaning? Are meanings things at all? How is meaning related to truth? Whether what we say is true depends on what we mean, so is meaning deeply connected to

truth? How are we to understand the concept of truth? What is the relationship between what a sentence means and what a person means in uttering a sentence?"

In addition to Frege, McGinn devotes a chapter each to Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*, Bertrand Russell's "Descriptions," Keith Donnellan's "Reference and Definite Descriptions," David Kaplan's "Demonstratives," Gareth Evans's "Understanding Demonstratives," Hilary Putnam's "Meaning

Frege is even attempted, and it gestures toward a truth that is fundamental to analytic philosophy. Clarity and complexity are not antagonists, but rather allies. The pursuit of clarity churns up unexpected complexity, but it can be tamed by the pursuit of further clarity.

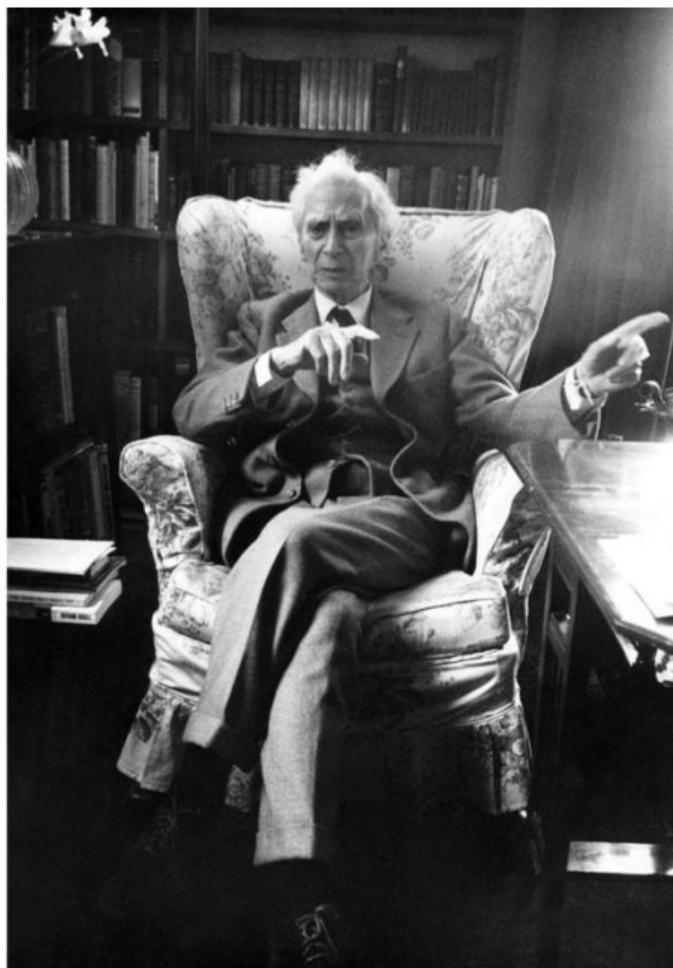
Many other classics in the philosophy of language have been omitted, including writing by Ludwig Wittgenstein, Peter Strawson, Michael Dummett, Willard van Ormand Quine, John Austin, Jerry Fodor, and John Searle. Also missing is the work of Noam Chomsky, a linguist whose insights into the mathematical structure of language have had a tremendous impact on the philosophy of language. The intended use for this book has shaped its scope.

Philosophy of Language is fitted to the duration of a college semester, but McGinn's sculpted choice of ten works also forms a narrative arc, allowing the reader to see the cumulative progress of the field. The theories build upon one another in the way that scientific theories do, with the results of one text leading to the ideas of the next. McGinn is very clear in explaining, for example, exactly how Donald Davidson appropriated the insights of Alfred Tarski's semantic theory of truth for formal languages (the rule-governed systems constructed by logicians to state and prove theorems in logic and mathematics) and adapted them for use in a theory of meaning for natural languages (the languages we actually speak, like Urdu and Spanish, which are richer and wilder than the fastidious language of the logicians).

Philosophical progress is perhaps less accurately measured in the discovery of answers and more in the discovery of questions, which often includes the discovery of the largeness lurking within seemingly small questions. The theories explained by McGinn reveal many prosaic linguistic situations to be perplexingly fascinating.

If, for example, I assert, "The prime minister of the US is six feet tall," have I said something false, in which case are you to infer that the prime minister of the US is not six feet tall, or have I managed to make no statement at all? Or if, standing at a bar, I remark to my companion, "The man drinking a martini is a famous philosopher," and it turns out that it is only water in the martini glass, have I managed nevertheless to say something true, if in fact the teetotaler is a famous philosopher? If, when asked to write a letter of recommendation for a student applying for graduate work, I write a letter that speaks exclusively of her excellent handwriting, how have I damned her chances for acceptance, since there is nothing in what I've written that says she is not competent for graduate work?

Such questions, removed from their theoretical contexts, may seem too pal-



Bertrand Russell, 1962; photograph by Marc Riboud

and Reference," Alfred Tarski's "The Semantic Conception of Truth," Donald Davidson's "Semantics for Natural Languages," and H. P. Grice's "Meaning." These texts thrust the reader into the core of philosophy of language: theories of reference, of meaning, of truth. They develop a specialized vocabulary to do justice to subtle but indispensable distinctions, starting with the distinction between a sentence, a proposition, and a statement:

A sentence is a collection of shapes, signs, or acoustic signals. Different shapes of letters on paper or acoustic signals in the air can correspond to the same proposition. Propositions, then, are very different from sentences—more abstract than physical. A sentence is the perceptible vehicle that expresses a proposition, and in addition can be uttered by a person. When you utter a sentence like "Snow is white," you thereby make a statement. A statement is a relationship between three things: the speaker, the sentence, and the proposition.

This standard act of conceptual analysis occurs on the second page of the book, before the discussion of

try to carry off the grandeur of the genuinely philosophical. And yet a reader giving herself over to McGinn's explanations will be led to understand how such modest inquiries bear the loftier aims of philosophy of language as he has stated them.

Gotlob Frege's "On Sense and Reference" is the only text analyzed in the book that was published before the twentieth century. It was the century that saw preoccupations about language engaging the attention of some of the best philosophical minds—many of them on display here—who were most responsible for the shift in approach toward analytic philosophy. Frege's article is devoted, by and large, to analyzing how the sentence "Hesperus is Phosphorus"—which is true, since the same planet, Venus, is referred to by both names—can be different from the sentence "Hesperus is Hesperus." The latter is a trivial tautology, while the former is not. These sentences must, therefore, mean different things. But how, exactly, since the terms that differ between them refer to the same thing?

Frege's article had a galvanizing effect on such philosophers as Bertrand Russell. When the young Russell arrived as a student at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1890, philosophy was dominated by the ponderous metaphysics of German idealism, which pounded out propositions purporting to delve into the murky and nebulous features of "the Absolute." An older Russell once reminisced that he had thought of language as transparent, the medium of thought that could simply be taken for granted. Frege demonstrated otherwise. Instead of trusting language to transport one into intimacy with the Absolute, it might be good to first discover how language manages to do more basic things, in the manner of Frege. Modern philosophy of language and analytic philosophy were both born in this same technical turn taken by philosophy.

Confusingly, the rising importance of philosophy of language coincided with a movement that argued that all of philosophy should be absorbed into philosophy of language. This latter movement was sometimes called "the linguistic turn" in philosophy. In 1967, Richard Rorty edited a collection of essays written by leading contemporary philosophers and entitled *The Linguistic Turn*. (He attributes the phrase to the logical positivist Gustav Bergmann.) Whereas philosophy of language is the branch of the discipline that sets itself the problem of understanding truth, meaning, reference, and so on (as in the paragraph by McGinn quoted above), the linguistic turn was a metaphysical movement that aimed to demonstrate that all philosophical questions can be solved—or, as these philosophers preferred to put it, dissolved—by attending sufficiently stringently to issues of language. This was a deflationary movement: it sought to use the analysis of language in order to show that there are no genuine philosophical problems. The philosophical urge is less to be cultivated than cured.

To make matters even more complicated, two different schools comprised this deliberately corrosive linguistic turn in philosophy: logical positivism and ordinary language philosophy, the latter often referred to as linguistic philosophy (just to add to the termino-

logical confusion). Both positivism and linguistic philosophy are represented in Rorty's collection.

Logical positivism rested on a theory of meaning that identified the meaning of a proposition with the empirical conditions that would verify it. So the meaning of the proposition "My wedding band is 14-karat gold" was equated with whatever tests and assays a chemist might use to verify what the ring is made of. If there is no way to verify a proposition, according to this theory, the proposition has no meaning. This had the devastating effect of rendering most of the traditional propositions pondered in philosophy—the nature of morality, or God, or beauty, or that bothersome Absolute—not just difficult, not just unknowable, but meaningless: no different in kind



from trying to interpret the lyrics of "Bibbidi-Bobbidi-Boo."

Linguistic philosophy, in contrast, was insistently antitheoretical, denying that there could be a coherent characterization of meaning in general. Instead, it fractured meaning into the different things we do with language—or, to use the terminology of Wittgenstein's influential *Philosophical Investigations*, the different "games" we enact within language. We don't just try to describe things in the world by using words; we also perform actions, as when I say "I do" under the right circumstances and get myself married; or when I say "I feel your pain" in a gesture of sympathy. Indeed, according to many ordinary language philosophers, even saying "I feel my pain" isn't an act of straightforward description, as if there is a pain inside me and I am simply pointing to it with words. Naively taking our language at face value leads, they argued, to insoluble problems.

In *The Concept of Mind*, Gilbert Ryle argued that mentalistic terms like "image" and "idea" hoodwinked us into thinking that they referred to actual things and thereby led to the incoherent belief that a mind existed independently of the brain, the doctrine he memorably ridiculed as "the ghost in the machine." It's like my exclaiming, "Oh, for Pete's sake!" and then being asked not only who Pete is but also what his sake is and where it is kept. And just as our naive swallowing of the language of everyday experience misleads us into asking about a mysterious "mind," our swallowing the language of morality misleads us into asking about mysterious "values," and our swallowing the language of mathematics misleads us into asking about

mysterious "numbers." "Philosophy," wrote Wittgenstein, "is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language."

It's easy to confuse analytic philosophy, which emphasizes the philosophy of language, with the metaphysical view that promised to dispose of all philosophical problems by rigorously attending to language. Those who bristle at the deflationary claim of the latter often lay their grudge at the feet of analytic philosophy. This is unjust. The technical turn is not the same as the linguistic turn.

Colin McGinn has no truck with the linguistic turn. He is known to have expressed a metaphysical view that, while identifying philosophy's task as the analysis of concepts, is maximally expansive, countenancing even metaphysics, the bugaboo of both positivists and linguistic philosophers. I have spoken of some of the omissions in *Philosophy of Language: The Classics Explained*, and one can detect a method behind some of the missing. The ten classic works in the book are consistent with McGinn's expansive view. None of their authors evaded or dismissed the traditional challenge to philosophy of clarifying and perhaps even answering profound questions.

McGinn has put himself at the service of his texts, not ranging beyond exegesis and clipped criticisms. He has also put himself at the service of philosophy of language, not pursuing the implications that the theories might have in other areas of philosophy. In *Naming and Necessity*, for example, Saul Kripke developed a theory of reference that crucially distinguishes rigid and non-rigid designators, which in turn requires that we think of our actual world as just one of many possible worlds. In the actual world the New England Patriots won the last Super Bowl. But there was nothing necessarily true about their victory: there are possible worlds in which the Seattle Seahawks won. The description "the winners of Super Bowl XLIX" happens to refer to the Patriots, but it does not do so in all possible worlds. This makes "the winners of Super Bowl XLIX" a non-rigid designator: its connection to the Patriots is pliable and bends to attach to different teams in other possible worlds.

A rigid designator, in contrast, inflexibly connects to the same referent in all possible worlds. "The square root of 4" is a rigid designator, referring to 2 in all possible worlds. The distinction has implications that reach well beyond language. Kripke used it to construct startling arguments in metaphysics (resuscitating the ancient notion of an essence—which is that attribute of a thing that makes the thing the very thing that it is), philosophy of mind (reformulating an argument for Cartesian dualism), and epistemology (arguing that scientifically discovered truths like "heat is molecular motion" are, though empirical, also necessarily true).

The achievements of philosophy of language have extended beyond philosophy itself, sometimes to surprisingly practical concerns. Take the philosopher with his water-filled martini glass, which comes from Keith Donnellan's "Reference and Definite Descriptions." (Definite descriptions begin with the definite article "the," and refer, if they refer at all, to no more than one thing.)

In the course of explaining how one can successfully refer to an individual using a definite description that doesn't literally apply to him, Donnellan distinguishes between referential and attributive definite descriptions.

When I use a definite description referentially, I have a specific individual in mind, and my aim is to refer to that individual. So long as I get the listener to know who or what I'm talking about, I'm using the definite description successfully, as I did in singling out the teetotaling philosopher. The specific content of the definite description doesn't really matter; I'm just using it, in effect, to point. But when I'm using a definite description attributively, the content is precisely the point. The phrase will refer to anything or anybody that uniquely satisfies what it describes, even if I, as the speaker, am ignorant of the referent, as when I say, "The bastard who hacked my computer has made my life a living hell."

Notice how the intentions of the speaker make a difference as to how the two kinds of definite descriptions function. Certain speech situations yield their meaning without inquiring about speakers' intentions. We need consult only the semantics of the situation created by the words. But other situations require inquiry into what is called pragmatics, which analyzes both the language employed and the language user's intentions. Consider that damning letter of reference written for my unfortunate student.

Pragmatics has received increasing attention from philosophers. McGinn obliquely refers to it in the last of his aims for the philosophy of language: "What is the relationship between what a sentence means and what a person means in uttering a sentence?" Every serious novelist pays close attention to this relationship, as does every serious novel reader. So does every legal scholar. How much is the interpretation of the law a matter of semantics—what the words of a law say—and how much is pragmatics—the intentions of the lawmakers when they passed it? Enormously practical outcomes ride on such decisions.

Or consider this real-life version of the teetotaling philosopher. A married man, abandoning his wife, fakes his death. He then illicitly marries again. A contract he has signed in forming a new business stipulates that "the wife of the depositor" shall benefit in the event of his death, and he makes it clear, though, of course, not in writing, that he intends the beneficiary to be the woman he is living with at the time he signs the contract, whom everyone understands to be his lawful wife. The bigamist dies, the proceeds go to his "wife," until the first shows up and declares herself the rightful beneficiary. Should "the wife of the depositor" be interpreted referentially, and refer to the woman the bigamist intended to indicate with the phrase, or attributively, as the real wife demands? Just such a legal situation arose in 1935, and the majority of the judges decided on the referential interpretation. The philosopher Gideon Rosen has argued that subtle points in the philosophy of language raised by, among others, Kripke, imply that the majority opinion was mistaken.

It was the philosopher H. P. Grice who is most responsible for turning

philosophers' minds toward the messy social-psychological world of pragmatics, analyzing the wealth of meaning that must be gleaned not from the words alone but from the context in which the words are produced, including, importantly, the speaker's intentions in uttering them, which furthermore take the speaker outside of his own mind and into the minds of his audience. A speaker has intentions regarding what he wants his words to do in the minds of others, and there, according to Grice, is where

a sentence's true meaning should be sought.

Here, too, real-world applications announce themselves, regarding, for example, the interpretation of the Constitution. Should we, as strict constructionists urge us, consider only the semantics of the words themselves in order to interpret the Constitution's meaning, or must we use pragmatics, too, consulting historians to try to understand the original intentions of the framers? Their intentions ranged over other minds, including, one might

argue, ours. Does a Gricean theory of meaning therefore lend support to those who argue for the Constitution as a living document?

Grice's is the last text explained by McGinn, and in the final pages he ventures beyond philosophy of language into a fascinating discussion of the "language of the brain," before abruptly cutting himself off. "At this point we stray into the area of philosophy of mind. We are now inquiring into the semantics of thought. That is a subject for another kind of

book. What we can say here is that these questions are not going to be easy."

McGinn has succeeded brilliantly in demonstrating the substantive progress made in philosophy of language, carrying us to the next set of questions, none of which is going to be easy. These questions are not limited to philosophers of language, nor should they be limited to philosophers. Those who value clarity and do not cringe before complexity can help themselves to what has so far been achieved. □

The First Great Arabic Novel

Robyn Creswell

Leg Over Leg, or the Turtle in the Tree: Concerning the Fariyaq, What Manner of Creature Might He Be
by Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq, edited and translated from the Arabic by Humphrey Davies. Library of Arabic Literature/ New York University Press, four volumes, 1,784 pp., \$125.00; \$40.00 each

Published in Paris in 1855, Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq's *Leg Over Leg* is often called the first novel written in Arabic. It does not read at all like *Little Dorrit*, whose first installment was published the same year, and certainly not like *Madame Bovary*, published two years later, but "novel" is as good a word as any to describe it. What else should we call a fiction with chapters of rhyming prose, countless dirty jokes and digressions, an elegy for a donkey, long lists of rare words for genitalia, perfumes, and games played by children, all hung on the frame of a travelogue to Egypt, Malta, England, and France? Al-Shidyaq knew that he was up to something new. He called his book "an innovation singular beyond compare."

Born to a Christian family in an Ottoman province of modern-day Lebanon, al-Shidyaq could not have published *Leg Over Leg* in his homeland, mostly because of what he had to say about religion. The Arabic word *bid'*, or "innovation," which he uses many times to describe his novel, means both "literary novelty" and "heresy." Al-Shidyaq guessed what the reaction to his work would be. The novel's first pages imagine its author caught in a crowd of howling priests, who accuse him of blasphemy and demand that the book be burned. In response, al-Shidyaq spends several pages listing euphemisms for "vagina," taken from a medieval Arabic dictionary: "the sprayer," "the gripper," "the large floppy one," etc. This is followed by lists for "penis" ("the falcon's stand," "the big spider," "the little man"), the anus ("the toothless one," "the catapult," "the whistler"), and intercourse ("to stick the kohl-stick in her kohl pot").

In the long view, of course, none of this was entirely new. Classical Arabic poetry has a genre called *sukhf*, dedicated to sexual obscenity and scatology, whose heresies are hard to match. "I entered the prayer niche of her asshole," sings the tenth-century poet Ibn al-Hajjaj, "and went cross-eyed from



Théodore Géricault: The Giaour, circa 1822–1823

the smell of saffron."¹ Al-Shidyaq knew this tradition well. In *Leg Over Leg*—a punning title that suggests amorous entwinement, among other things—he compares the work of al-Hajjaj to the obscene writings of Laurence Sterne and John Cleland, whom he considers even more licentious. So al-Shidyaq's innovations are not creations out of nothing, but reminders of what was already there, like rare words in an old dictionary.

Al-Shidyaq meant for these reminders to be more than titillating. His aim was to show up the provincialism and prudishness of his contemporaries when measured against the past—a past richly alive in the Arabic language itself. Elsewhere in the novel, he lists the names of dozens of idols worshiped by pre-Islamic tribes. These idols were destroyed by the early Muslim conquerors, who wanted to erase all traces of the old cults. But they couldn't erase the names. For al-Shidyaq, this roll call serves as a reminder of religious wars

that few authorities in Lebanon, then or now, would want to remember. It makes sense, in this light, to think of *Leg Over Leg* as the first novel in Arabic, whose later examples, from Naguib Mahfouz's Cairo Trilogy to Alaa al-Aswany's *The Yacoubian Building*, often provide social criticism in fictional guise. And here readers of Dickens are back on familiar ground. *Little Dorrit* was, among other things, a passionate plea for prison reform.

Faris al-Shidyaq (he added the name "Ahmad" later) was probably born in 1805, though it may have been 1801 or 1804, in a village just north of Beirut. The al-Shidyaqs were a prominent family of Maronites, an Eastern Catholic Church, whose male members were teachers, scribes, and priests (*shidyaq* is from a Greek word for "subdeacon"). Faris, along with his older brother As'ad, were seminary students at 'Ayn Waraqqa, a training ground for the Maronite elite. In his novel, whose first chapters read like a bildungsroman, al-Shidyaq paints a harsh picture of his early teachers. They have never read any book but the Psalms, which they do not understand because the Arabic translation is so poor. The ignorance—along with the hypocrisy and

lecherousness—of priests is a leitmotif of al-Shidyaq's novel. Yet it was in places like 'Ayn Waraqqa that what is now known as the Arabic *Nahda* had its beginnings.

The *Nahda*, meaning "reawakening" or "renaissance," was a nineteenth-century movement of reform and modernization throughout the Middle East. Fifty years ago, scholars traced its roots to the Napoleonic invasion of Egypt (1798–1801), which was supposed to have roused the East from its dogmatic slumbers. The *Nahda*'s guiding principles—secularism, the critique of absolutism, educational reform—were seen as weak imitations of European originals. The same is true of literary forms. The Arab novel, short story, and theater were thought to be derivative of Western models. The assumption was that literary history ran in one direction, and that innovative writers from the East were necessarily mimics.

But innovations are just as often the result of a new attitude toward old material, as recent scholars of the *Nahda* have tended to argue. It was not just the influx of foreign models that set off the Arabic renaissance, but a rediscovery of native traditions. In this way, the *Nahda* resembles the modernism of Pound and Eliot and Yeats, which fused metaphysical poets with the Upanishads, Noh drama, and Gaelic revivals.

One of the *Nahda*'s most important revivals was that of the Arabic language itself, and here al-Shidyaq's achievement was central. His fascination with Arabic was like that of an archaeologist who uncovers a sophisticated alien culture—although in this case that culture was his own. The abundance and precision of old Arabic words, which al-Shidyaq found in classical dictionaries, suggested that there was nothing in the world that did not already have its place in what he called "our noble language." For example, *khafut*, "the woman who is considered comely on her own but not among other women"; *buldah*, "freedom from hair of the space between the eyebrows"; *bahsala*, "to remove one's clothes and gamble with them"; *samut*, "having legs so thick that her anklets make no sound"; or *dihindih*, "a children's game, in which they gather and then say this word, and any who mispronounces it has to stand on one leg and hop seven times." None of this advances the plot of his novel, but al-Shidyaq is openly impatient with narrative conventions. At one point he boasts that *Leg Over*

¹Sinan Antoon has written an erudite study of the genre, from which I have taken this verse (while modifying its translation): *The Poetics of the Obscene in Premodern Arabic Poetry: Ibn al-Hajjaj and Sukhf* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 123.

GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS

A CURRENT LISTING



Shepherd/ W & K Galleries, 58 East 79th Street, New York, NY, 10075; (212) 861-4050; shepherdny@aol.com; www.shepherdgallery.com. Tuesdays–Saturday, 10am–6pm. “Three Centuries of British Art”: An exhibition in association with Nicholas Bagshawe Fine Art (London), Guy Peppiatt Fine Art (London), and Moore-Gwyn Fine Art (London). September 29 through October 24. Highlights include an early J. M. W. Turner drawing of fishing boats, a double portrait of children by Joshua Reynolds’s pupil Thomas Beach, a head study by Sir Thomas Lawrence, figure drawings by Richard Cosway, George Romney, Paul Sandby, and William Hoare of Bath, and landscapes by David Cox. Also included are a recently rediscovered watercolor of a Neapolitan market by John William Waterhouse, a John Singer Sargent late society portrait, and the Whistler-esque view from a ship by Joseph Severn. From the twentieth century are William Orpen’s drawing of Sargent and a John Piper set design for a Benjamin Britten ballet. The exhibition is accessible on our website: www.shepherdgallery.com.



Gemla Leksaksfabrik AB. Rocking Horse, 1900. Wood, horsehair, glass, leather, metal. © Roma Capitale – Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali – Collezione di giocattoli antichi, CGA LS 5242.

Photographer: Bruce White

Bard Graduate Center Galleries, 18 West 86th Street, New York, NY, 10024; (212) 501-3023; www.bgc.bard.edu/gallery; Tuesday–Sunday, 11am–5pm, Thursday to 8pm. On view through January 17: “Swedish Wooden Toys,” the first in-depth study of the history of wooden playthings in Sweden from the seventeenth to the twenty-first centuries. This colorful exhibition features remarkable doll houses, puzzles, games, pull toys, trains, planes, automobiles, and more. In the Focus Gallery through January 10: “Revisions—Zen for Film” explores *Zen for Film* (1962–1964), one of the most evocative films created by the Korean-American artist Nam June Paik (1932–2006).



Michele Martin Taylor, *A Capitol Garden*, watercolor, 11 x 16 inches

continue exhibiting recent works in watercolor by NYC artist David Baise: “Images of Manhattan.” Our gallery is dedicated to the finest work in landscape, still life, genre, urban, and marine art by current traditional American painters, many with national reputations.

American Painting Fine Art, 5118 MacArthur Blvd., NW, Washington, DC, 20016; (202) 244-3244; www.classicamericanpainting.com. Wednesday–Saturday, 11am–7pm, and by appointment. Paintings by Potomac River School artists Andrei Kushnir, Mary Kokoski, Barbara Nuss, and Brenda Kidera, and Garden Paintings by Michele Martin Taylor. We

continue exhibiting recent works in watercolor by NYC artist David Baise: “Images of Manhattan.” Our gallery is dedicated to the finest work in landscape, still life, genre, urban, and marine art by current traditional American painters, many with national reputations.

Swann Auction Galleries, 104 East 25th Street, New York, NY, 10010; (212) 254-4710; Upcoming Auction: Autographs, October 22; Preview October 19 through 21, 10am–6pm. This auction will offer a strong selection of presidential autographs, many from the Forbes Collection, as well as an unusually large group of autographs by musicians. Among the most remarkable items are a letter signed by Mohandas K. Gandhi, a photograph signed by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, and an autograph poem signed by John Quincy Adams, inscribed in an album kept by his niece. The album also includes an inscription signed by her grandfather, John Adams. Also available are items signed by world leaders, scientists, astronauts, artists, businessmen, and others.



Photograph signed and inscribed by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky to librettist Paul Collin, 1888. Estimate \$6,000 to \$9,000

First Street Gallery, 526 West 26th Street, Suite 209, New York, NY, 10001; (646) 336-8053, www.firststreetgallery.net. Tuesday–Saturday, 11am–6pm. October 6 through 31, 2015: **MARI LYONS**, “Floating Palettes, and other recent work.” Lyons uses objects—real and imagined—to explore the dramatic world of an artist’s studio. An Ibibio sculpture, rampant carousel horse, African rooster, wooden copy of an eighteenth-century angel, and casts from the ancient Greek live vibrantly among the brushes, paintings, vases, bottles, and easels that inhabit the painter’s studio. The paintings attempt to anchor “floating space” in a bold and compelling celebration of the joy of painting.



Ibibio Figure with Friends in Studio II, 2015, o/c, 70 x 60 inches

John Davis Gallery, 362 1/2 Warren Street, Hudson, NY, 12534; (518) 828-5907, art@johndavisgallery.com, www.johndavisgallery.com. Thursday–Monday, 11am–5pm. October 17 through November 8, 2015: **Lee Marshal, Watercolors**. “In my recent paintings I experiment with transparent layers of colored geometry to create ethereal architectures. My invented images are rooted in a love for urban and wild places along with a desire to converse with favorite works of art.” —Lee Marshall, 2015. Additional Exhibits: Jan Abt, Erin Walrath, Nandita Raman, Elisa Jensen, and Ying Li.



Lee Marshall, *Garnet Power*, 2014, watercolor/paper, 30 x 22 inches



Costantino Nivola, M36, circa 1960–1961, concrete, 12 x 9 1/2 x 8 inches

The Drawing Room, 66 Newtown Lane, East Hampton, NY, 11937; (631) 324-5016, www.drawingroom-gallery.com. Please note our seasonal change in hours: Monday, Friday, and Saturday, 10am–5pm; Sunday, 11am–5pm. **COSTANTINO NIVOLA** (1911–1988): “Early Concretes.” **ANTONIO ASIS**: “Cercles Concentriques.” September 12 through October 26. Concurrent exhibitions feature selected rare concrete sculptures and bas reliefs by Costantino Nivola, a Sardinian-born artist, and gouaches on paperboard by the Argentine painter and sculptor Antonio Asis. Nivola was immersed throughout his career in the nature of sculptural form, integrating architecture, abstraction, and figuration in varied mediums. In concrete, Nivola’s innovative techniques of casting and carving green cement generated some of Modernism’s most revered archetypal forms in varying scales. Asis, who has lived in Paris since 1956, was integral to the development of kinetic and optical art. His focus on geometric abstraction and dynamic motion propelled this series of brilliant compositions of concentric circles and vibrating color.



Jacob Lawrence, *Dancing at the Savoy*, 1943, gouache on paper, 14 x 21 inches

Alexandre Gallery has moved to a new space at 724 Fifth Avenue, 4th Floor, New York, NY, 10019; (212) 755-2828; inquiries@alexandregallery.com, www.alexandregallery.com. Tuesday–Friday, 10am–5:30pm and Saturday 11am–5pm. **RE-OPENING GROUP EXHIBITION**: September 15 through October 31, 2015.

Among the contemporary artists featured will be Gregory Amenoff, Will Barnet, Brett Bigbee, James Cambonne, Lois Dodd, Anne Harris, Emily Nelligan, Tom Uttech, John Walker, and Neil Welliver. Early twentieth-century artists will include Arthur Dove, Marsden Hartley, William H. Johnson, Jacob Lawrence, John Marin, Elie Nadelman, Georgia O’Keeffe, Horace Pippin, and others.



Pen and Brush, www.penandbrush.com. We believe that art and literature are vital aspects of the human experience. We also believe that work created by women deserves to be recognized and valued on its merit—not judged by the gender of the maker. That’s why it’s our mission to advocate for gender parity by creating a platform for compelling and professional work by women artists. Join us this fall as we unveil our outstanding inaugural exhibit, selected by a group of independent curators who believe in helping women artists gain greater access and visibility in the marketplace. Pen and Brush: Until it’s just about the art.

Arts District Center for the Arts, 740 East 3rd Street, Los Angeles, CA; (213) 814-7164; www.ladadspace.org; artsdistrict@gmail.com. Opening in early 2016 at One Santa Fe, the Arts District Center for the Arts will serve the Arts District community and downtown Los Angeles with a gallery, screening room, and theater workshop space, creating opportunities for LA artists to connect with audiences and offering original, progressive programming that challenges the traditional boundaries of theater and the plastic arts. The ADCA—keeping it weird in LA!

ARTS DISTRICT CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Taos Center for The Arts, 133 Paseo del Pueblo Norte, Taos, NM, 87571; (575) 758-2052, deborah@tcataos.org, www.tcataos.org, www.pressingthroughtime.com. Monday–Friday, 10am–5pm. “Pressing Through Time—150 Years of Printmaking in Taos” is a multivenue set of exhibitions devoted to prints and printmaking in Taos.

This event marks the first comprehensive overview of printmaking in Taos Valley with exhibits featuring work from the earliest known images of the region through contemporary prints. The exhibitions are spread across fifteen museums, arts organizations, and galleries in Taos during the months of September 2015 through January 2016. A symposium is scheduled for October 17 and 18 in the Arthur Bell Auditorium at Harwood Museum of Art. See www.pressingthroughtime.com for more information.



Barbara Latham, *A Taos Street Scene*, woodcut, circa 1935

GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS
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Leg is “a repository for every idea that appealed to me, relevant or irrelevant.”

The history of the Arabic *Nahda* is closely linked to that of American Protestant missionaries, whose arrival in Ottoman lands also had important consequences for the al-Shidyaq family. In 1818, the first New England Congregationalists landed on Malta, a staging ground for evangelical missions. The Americans hoped to make “spiritual conquests” in a Holy Land sunk into degeneracy and suffering under the despotism of Muslim rule. But the Protestants were only allowed to preach to fellow Christians and their initial record was unpromising: five years after their arrival, they had yet to make a single convert. (It was in part because of such failures that the missionaries gradually turned their efforts toward education, resulting in the establishment, in 1866, of the Syrian Protestant College, later renamed the American University of Beirut.)

The Congregationalists founded their first mission station in Beirut in 1823 and here they made a significant spiritual conquest—Faris al-Shidyaq’s older brother, As’ad. The missionaries employed As’ad as a copyist and translator and engaged him in discussions of faith. He was an articulate, anxious, and passionately spiritual young man. One of the missionaries remembered him lamenting, “My own countrymen are in so much error I cannot please *them*. God I have no reason to think I please nor do I please myself. What shall I do?” The Maronite patriarch threatened him with excommunication if he did not break off relations with “the Biblemen,” but As’ad refused. He was detained in the remote monastery of Qannubin, where he was interrogated, tortured, and finally allowed to die in confinement. The missionaries claimed As’ad as a “Syrian Luther” and “the first Protestant martyr”; his family and his sect did their best to forget him.²

As’ad’s persecution marked his brother deeply; one might even say it determined the course of his life. Religious intolerance is certainly a major theme of *Leg Over Leg*. Faris al-Shidyaq also had close relations with the missionaries—though one of them commented, “He does not appear to have felt...the power of the religion in his own soul”—and soon after As’ad’s detention he asked the American Congregationalists to smuggle him out of Lebanon. He must have feared for his safety, but may also have been eager to flee the orthodoxy of his sect. Al-Shidyaq spent much of the next twenty years in Egypt and Malta, where British missionaries had a printing press. At some point he too converted to Protestantism. He returned to Lebanon only once during the long remainder of his life and there is no evidence to suggest that he ever missed his homeland.

This life history—religious school, the encounter with Protestants, flight from

²The story of As’ad and the Protestant missionaries is the subject of Ussama Makdisi’s instructive history, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Cornell University Press, 2008).

Lebanon, travels to Egypt and Malta—supplies the narrative for the first three volumes of *Leg Over Leg* (there are four in all). The hero of the tale is named “the Fariyaq,” an amalgam of “Faris” and “al-Shidyaq,” and the novel is clearly autobiographical in some sense. In the opening books, the Fariyaq tries out various professions: tutor, copyist, trader, translator. He fails at all of them, as picaresque heroes must, partly from bad luck and partly from a restive temperament. But the Fariyaq’s story frequently fades into the background, replaced by bawdy anecdotes, literary disquisitions, or rants against the Catholic Church, some of them cribbed from Voltaire.



Northern Egypt, circa 1898–1908

the Hebrew tradition of midrashic and Talmudic interpretations. In the Arabic case, it was chiefly the Koran and the work of poets that called for explanation, and interpreters often zeroed in on the same things al-Shidyaq does in his novel—words and idioms that were obscure or had fallen out of usage. Al-Shidyaq pays homage to this learned tradition, but adapts it to contemporary needs. Rather than a commentator on authorized texts, he makes himself into a commentator on the world around him. Al-Shidyaq’s word lists and philological digressions are not just ways of showing off his mastery of the language, but essays in social observation and criticism.

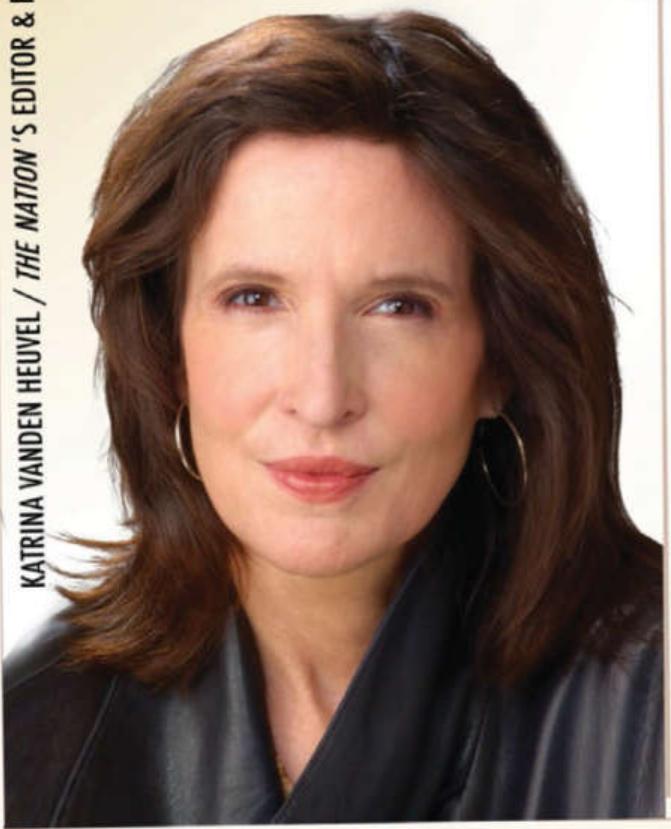
What most enraged al-Shidyaq was his contemporaries’ illiteracy: the real illiteracy of the poorer classes, along with almost all women, and the literate classes’ ignorance of their own tongue. Everywhere the Fariyaq goes in his travels, he finds priests whose knowledge of Arabic is a disgrace. “All church books are full of horrible mistakes,” he writes, then proves his point by looking into an Arabic version of the New Testament. (One of al-Shidyaq’s jobs in Malta was to begin a translation of the Bible into Arabic; at the same time, he wrote but did not publish a critique of the gospels’ historical credibility.) The Fariyaq meets poets who parrot foreign phrases while mangling their own tongue, monks who do not know the difference between a dictionary (*qamus*) and a nightmare (*kabus*), and literary men whose language is full of lame metaphors and the flattery of powerful men.

Al-Shidyaq’s own writing is a rebuke to all this. It is acrobatic, cutting, and baroquely self-aware. It is the style of a virtuoso in flight from the orthodoxy of his place and time. The great historian of the Middle East Albert Hourani once wrote, apropos of al-Shidyaq and his generation of Arab Christians, “Having broken away from the closed world of the minority, what community could they belong to?” For al-Shidyaq, this question might be rephrased, “Whom am I writing for?” In practical terms, his audience could only have been the literate class of Levantine traders scattered across the Mediterranean—a real and powerful diaspora, but hardly a community. Where Dickens and Flaubert could rely on an established middle-class readership, including a large number of literate women, al-Shidyaq had no such assurance. One feels this anxiety in his writing, which is sometimes shrill and histrionic, as though he were afraid there was no one paying attention.

A few years after publishing *Leg Over Leg*, al-Shidyaq converted to Islam (taking the name “Ahmad”), which seemed to him a more worldly religion than either sect of Christianity. He spent the last twenty-seven years of his life in Istanbul—he died in 1887—where he found a community of sorts. He established the most influential journal of his day, *al-Jawa’ib*, and ran a printing press that brought out new editions of classical works in Arabic. But al-Shidyaq’s novel tells a less settled story. It is the work of someone trying to write something new and, more radically, to be something new (in part



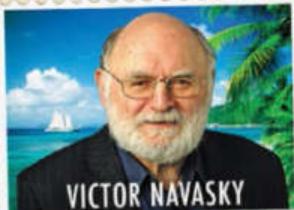
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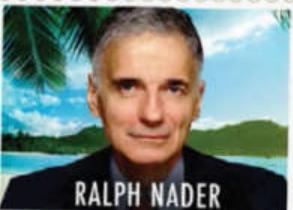
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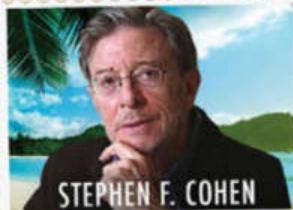
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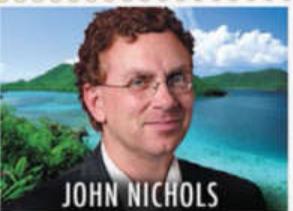
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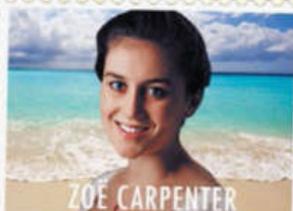
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by reimagining older professions like philology). In his skepticism toward all traditional beliefs and forms of expression, al-Shidyaq most resembles what we now call an intellectual—a peculiarly modern thing to be.

In 1848, al-Shidyaq was invited to England to complete his translation of the Bible into Arabic. He spent most of the next seven years in Europe, traveling between Cambridge, London, and Paris. He met many of the great Orientalists of his day, whom he despised almost as much as the illiterate priests of his childhood. (A twenty-five-page appendix to the novel lists the errors he found in their manuscripts.) He applied, without success, for the chair of Arabic at Oxford, and sent panegyric poems to Queen Victoria and Napoleon III—hoping again for some sort of employment—but they went unanswered.

The last volume of *Leg Over Leg* is a fictionalized account of these travels. Al-Shidyaq did not enjoy Europe, though he admired its libraries. His remarks on London and Parisian society are as irascible as his earlier satires of life in the Levant. It goes without saying that he hated English weather and cuisine. The small towns were boring (“anyone who... feels a calling to be a monk should hie himself to them”), but the capital was filthy. Paris was even filthier, with inhabitants to match.

There is an air of received wisdom in some of al-Shidyaq’s reflections on Europe. He was never comfortable speaking a foreign language, which seems strange for someone as interested in words as he was. What interested al-

Shidyaq was not words as such, however, but Arabic words. The superiority of his own language was so obvious to him that it needed no demonstration, unless his novel itself is taken as that demonstration (for many Muslims, the Koran provides the same proof). “As soon as I started learning English I found myself forgetting an equivalent amount of my own language,” the Fariyaq says, explaining why he stopped. One might argue that this is not the best attitude for a traveler. It may be why so many of al-Shidyaq’s pronouncements seem copied from books: “The French make no distinction between the respectable woman and the harlot,” etc. But there are also passages of wonderful irritability, which could only have been written by someone who knew what it was to live down and out in Paris before it was a city of grand boulevards:

Look well at these houses and how high their stories rise and how many steps they have and how dirty and badly arranged are their sanitary facilities and latrines—for in a single house, you may find a number of latrines next to apartments along with a number of outlets for water and sewage, and you may well imagine the disgusting smells that issue from them in the morning! In addition to the fact that these latrines are dirty, squalid, and without water supply, they have no bolts on the inside to prevent anyone from bursting in on a person in his privacy.

In Arabic, of course, there is a word for that. “Azramahu,” al-Shidyaq tells us,

means “he interrupted him while he was urinating.”

More interesting than what he has to say about Europe is what al-Shidyaq has to say about women. Early in volume three, the Fariyaq falls in love with the daughter of a Catholic merchant. Her family objects to a Protestant suitor, but the daughter rebels and the Fariyaq agrees to convert to Catholicism for the day of the wedding—a comic rewrite of al-Shidyaq’s family tragedy. His wife, called the Fariyaqiyah, a name as strange in Arabic as it looks in English and which might be translated as “the essence of the Fariyaq,” becomes the hero’s traveling companion for the rest of the novel. *Leg Over Leg* turns out to be about the education of women



Graffiti that reads 'For Beirut' in Beirut, Lebanon, 2010

as much as the adventures of men. The Fariyaqiyah begins as an illiterate and ends as her husband’s intellectual equal.

The final two volumes of *Leg Over Leg* present a portrait of this marriage. It is not a realistic portrait and does not try to be. It is an ideal, just as the couples of screwball comedy are an ideal: there are no diapers to change, but there is a lot of witty banter, and a frank acknowledgment of sexual desire. It is a marriage based, as the two heroes say at the end of a dizzy, rhymed dialogue, on conversation and copulation. For the Fariyaqiyah, gender equality means an equal right to pleasure as well as education; a recurrent joke of their dialogues is that she understands the Fariyaq’s puns in the dirtiest possible sense. By the end of the novel, she has convinced him that polygamy is an abomination and that women have an equal right to divorce. “There can be no *Nahda* in the East,” al-Shidyaq is reported to have said, “without a *Nahda* of women.”

Leg Over Leg is among the first books in the Library of Arabic Literature, a series modeled in part on the Loeb Classical Library of Greek and Latin texts. The new Library will publish translations of classical works in bilingual, *en face* editions. The vast body of Arabic classical literature—encompassing poetry, biography, theology, jurisprudence, and many others genres—is virtually unknown to readers of English. In the present circumstances, this is a remarkable and dismaying fact. There are many good translations of Tang poetry and Sanskrit epics, to say nothing of Western classical literature, but how many English readers have even heard of the Golden Odes, or al-Mutanabbi, or Abu Tammam?

Translating Arabic into English presents special difficulties, though they are hardly unique. Literary Arabic is a written language, spoken only in formal situations. Its high eloquence has no equivalent in modern English, which relies on the vernacular for so much of its vitality. This is one reason why many translations from the Arabic sound mannered—they are trying to

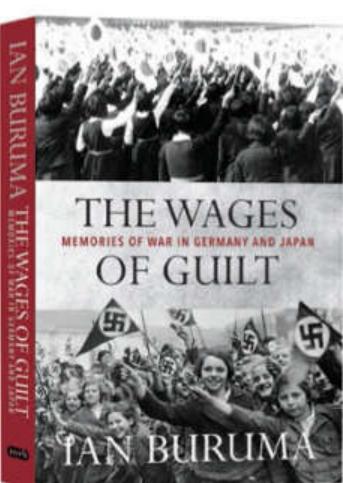
maintain the stateliness of the original. Beyond this structural difficulty, it is simply the case that no translator has yet come up with a plausible idiom for classical Arabic in contemporary English. This is what Ezra Pound’s *Cathay* did for ancient Chinese poetry. His translations, as tender and austere as anything in the language, opened up a new literature to nonspecialist readers. Eliot famously called Pound “the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time,” and our own time could use an inventor of Arabic.

Humphrey Davies’s version of al-Shidyaq’s novel is the first in English and it has many virtues. In Arabic, *Leg Over Leg* is a daunting work, more admired than read. Al-Shidyaq wrote it with a dictionary in one hand, which is how even a literate native speaker would have to read it. Davies writes in his afterword of the many days he spent with online lexicons, and his version is scrupulously informed. He knows what the words mean and in this case that is saying a great deal. But one of his decisions as a translator seems to me regrettable. Many passages in the original, including four full chapters, are composed in *saj'*, or rhyming prose. This was a common feature of classical texts. The morphology of Arabic makes rhyming exceedingly easy, almost as easy as alliteration is in English. Davies has tried to reproduce these rhymes in his translation. Here is a passage from early in the novel (the parentheses are from an imagined audience):

His parents were people of notability, nobility, and righteousness (Bravo! Bravo!) but while their prospects for the world to come were expansive, their prospects in the world in which they lived were not with these *co-extensive*, and their reputations were, of their *purse*, the *inverse* (Boo! Boo!).

Davies has set himself an impossible task. The Arabic rhymes are effortless, while the English rhymes are labored. Extended over many pages, the effect is wearisome (the italics, which are not in the Arabic, do not help). The two long phrases about the parents’ “prospects” translate one short phrase in the original: *dinahuma kana awsa' min dunyahuma*; literally, “their religion was greater than their means,” or more idiomatically, “they were too pious for their own good.” In his determination to keep the rhyme, Davies seems willing to manipulate the sense (and torture his syntax), which is strange in a translation otherwise so meticulous.

I do not mean to suggest that the problem of rhyme, only one of many difficulties posed by al-Shidyaq’s novel, has an obvious solution. But Davies would have done better to settle for a translation into lively English that got the meanings right, rather than try to reproduce the virtuosity of the original. This is what the Loeb translators aimed at and generally achieved. In his afterword, Davies calls his version “exploratory,” which seems like the right spirit in which to approach the work, for translators and readers alike. For all its points of intersection with the novels of Sterne and Dickens, there is really nothing like *Leg Over Leg* in English. When al-Shidyaq wrote it, there was nothing like it in Arabic, either. We are still learning how to read its heresies. □



THE WAGES OF GUILT

MEMORIES OF WAR IN GERMANY AND JAPAN

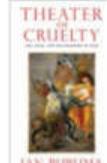
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In this now classic book, internationally famed journalist Ian Buruma examines how Germany and Japan have attempted to come to terms with their conduct during World War II—a war that they aggressively began and humiliatingly lost, and in the course of which they committed monstrous war crimes. As he travels through both countries, to Berlin and Tokyo, Hiroshima and Auschwitz, he encounters people who are remarkably honest in confronting the past and others who astonish by their evasions of responsibility, some who wish to forget the past and others who wish to use it as a warning against the resurgence of militarism.

Buruma explores these contrasting responses to the war and the two countries’ very different ways of memorializing its atrocities, as well as the ways in which political movements, government policies, literature, and art have been shaped by its shadow. Today, seventy years after the end of the war, he finds that while the Germans have for the most part coped with the darkest period of their history, the Japanese remain haunted by historical controversies that should have been resolved long ago. Sensitive yet unsparing, complex and unsettling, this is a profound study of how people face up to or deny terrible legacies of guilt and shame.

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**The Dark Net:
Inside The Digital
Underworld**
by Jamie Bartlett.
Melville House,
308 pp, \$27.95

Early this year, a robot in Switzerland purchased ten tablets of the illegal drug MDMA, better known as “ecstasy,” from an online marketplace and had them delivered through the postal service to a gallery in St. Gallen where the robot was then set up. The drug buy was part of an installation called “Random Darknet Shopper,” which was meant to show what could be obtained on the “dark” side of the Internet. In addition to ecstasy, the robot also bought a baseball cap with a secret camera, a pair of knock-off Diesel jeans, and a Hungarian passport, among other things.

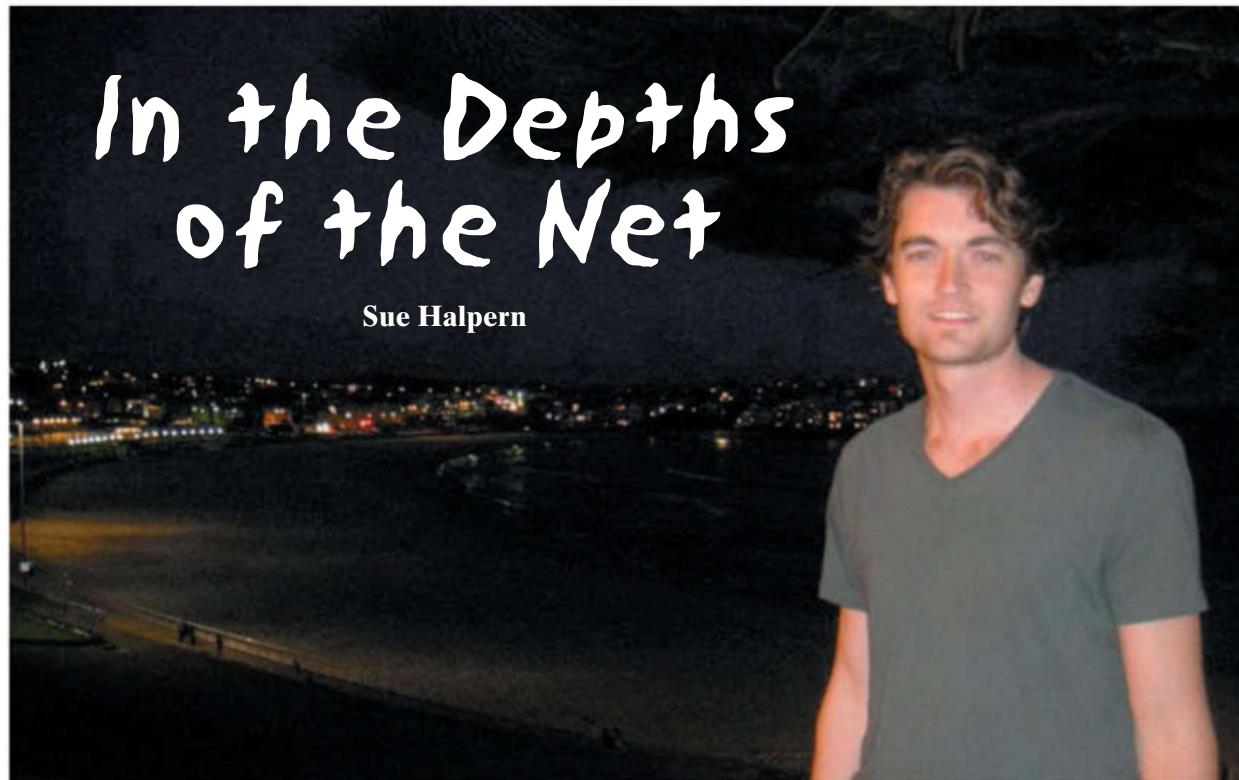
Passports stolen and forged, heroin, crack cocaine, semiautomatic weapons, people who can be hired to use those weapons, computer viruses, and child pornography—especially child pornography—are all easily obtained in the shaded corners of the Internet. For example, in the interest of research, Jamie Bartlett—the author of *The Dark Net: Inside the Digital Underworld*, a picturesque tour of this disquieting netherworld—successfully bought a small amount of marijuana from a dark-Net site; anyone hoping to emulate him will find that the biggest dilemma will be with which seller—there are scores—to do business. My own forays to the dark Net include visits to sites offering counterfeit drivers’ licenses, methamphetamine, a template for a US twenty-dollar bill, files to make a 3D-printed gun, and books describing how to receive illegal goods in the mail without getting caught. There were, too, links to rape and child abuse videos. According to a study released a few years ago, 80 percent of all dark-Net traffic relates to pedophilia.

The standard metaphor for explaining the dark Net’s relation to the Internet is the familiar iceberg. The towering spire, looming above the water, is the Internet that we navigate daily when we use a search engine like Google or type in a Web address. Underneath it, massive and ghostly, is its sinister consort, the dark Net. But that’s not quite accurate. There is a tremendous amount of quotidian Internet traffic, like online banking and medical record-keeping, that is intentionally and appropriately kept out of sight, locked away in secure databases, protected by passwords or tucked behind paywalls, none of it nefarious or unlawful. This is what is known as “the deep Web,” and by some estimates it is five hundred times larger than the “surface Web”—the Web of Amazon and YouTube and Twitter and Tumblr.

It is within the deep Web that the dark Net (or the dark Web) resides. It is comprised of sites without standard Web addresses, addresses that are not indexed and often not fixed, so that only those who know them can find them. And because these sites are hard to discover, the dark Net is home to a whole range of illicit and covert activi-

In the Depths of the Net

Sue Halpern



Ross Ulbricht, who was recently sentenced to life in prison for running the illegal dark-Net marketplace Silk Road

ties. As Bartlett puts it in the obliquely sympathetic way typical of his book, “Terrorists, extremists, serious organized criminals, and child pornographers, denied mainstream channels, are often early adopters of new technology and also have an incentive to stay secret and hidden.”

Secret and hidden are the hallmarks of the dark Net, for while it is possible to use Google to find sites on the surface Web that sell cannabis by the pound (www.marijuanaonline007.com), guns without a federal firearms license (www.gunbroker.com), and stolen credit card data (www.tomsguide.com/us/how-to-buy-stolen-credit-cards.news-18387.html), and while Bartlett himself introduces readers to a trio of young women who perform sex acts via webcam for money (as he sits a few feet away) on an easily accessible site called Chaturbate, anyone who engages with these businesses leaves a trail that can be easily tracked. What makes the dark Net especially attractive to people who would subvert the law is that it promises—and most often delivers—anonymity to buyers and sellers, as well as to anyone else who wants to be unobserved. This could include, for example, whistleblowers, activists, terrorists, and citizens of authoritarian regimes aiming to bypass their censors.

To reach a dark-Net address, one must log onto one of the small number of Web browsers that conceal both identity and location, the most popular of which is called Tor. Developed by the United States Naval Research Laboratory to provide a safe way for dissidents in repressive regimes to communicate online, Tor continues to be funded in part by the US government through the National Science Foundation, as well as by a number of civil liberties organizations. Built on top of the Firefox Web browser, anyone, anywhere, can download the Tor browser and use it to navigate the entire Internet—the surface, the deep, and the dark Web—and do so leaving no trace. As Andrew Lewman, the executive director of the Tor Project, described it to the BBC last year:

The Tor Network is a network of about 6,000 relays, which are serv-

Ross Ulbricht, was sentenced in May to life in prison without the possibility of parole. Silk Road did not sell crack, cyanide, or anything else itself. Rather, it connected buyers and sellers and took a cut of the transactions. It is estimated that Ulbricht, an unassuming former Eagle Scout who lived in a shared apartment in San Francisco and ran his business out of public libraries and coffee shops, was making around \$20,000 a day, while the site itself, which began operating in 2011, generated, all told, an estimated \$1.2 billion. According to *The New York Times*, citing government investigators:

During Silk Road’s nearly three years of operation, more than 1.5 million transac-

tions were conducted on the site, involving over 100,000 buyer accounts and nearly 4,000 vendor accounts.... At the time of its closing, the site listed more than 13,000 offerings of illegal drugs.

Prior to sentencing, Ulbricht’s lawyers argued that by moving drug sales off the street to a dark-Net Amazon-like marketplace where buyers could rate sellers,

transactions on the Silk Road web site were significantly safer than traditional illegal drug purchases, and included quality control and accountability features that made purchasers substantially safer than they were when purchasing drugs in a conventional manner.

Jamie Bartlett, who bought his cannabis from a Silk Road vendor, echoes the defense when he writes:

Online drugs markets are transforming the dirty business of buying drugs into a simple transaction between empowered consumers and responsive vendors.... The real secret of dark net markets is good customer service.

The judge, however, resoundingly rejected this line of reasoning, calling it “a privileged argument and...an argument made by one of the privileged” before handing down a sentence that was remarkably harsher than the harsh sentence requested by the prosecution.

When he was arrested, Ulbricht was said to be worth about \$30 million, though none of his money was denominated in legal tender. Instead, his wealth was sequestered online in bitcoins, the dark Net’s currency of choice, since it veils users, much like the dark Net itself. As Bartlett describes it:

A Bitcoin is nothing more than a unique string of numbers. It has no independent value, and is not tied to any real-world currency. Its strength and value come from the fact that people believe in it and use it. Anyone can download

a Bitcoin wallet on to their computer, buy Bitcoins with traditional currency from a currency exchange, and use them to buy or sell a growing number of products or services as easily as sending an email. Transactions are secure, fast, and free, with no central authority controlling value or supply, and no middlemen taking a slice.

In 2009, when the first bitcoin transaction took place, a single bitcoin was worth less than half a penny. By April 2013, its value had risen more than 9,999,900 percent, to \$100. Then, in November of that year, after a Senate Homeland Security Committee hearing, which was described by the press as a “lovefest” between officials from the federal government and representatives of the bitcoin community, the value of a single bitcoin rose to an astronomical \$1,023. Since then it has incrementally decreased to about \$280 today, even as a growing number of conventional retailers in the United States and Europe have begun accepting bitcoins as payment for real goods, including Overstock, Microsoft, and Dell in the United States, Monoprix in France, and AirBaltic in Latvia, to name just a few. By the end of the year, Barclays Bank in the UK will begin accepting deposits in bitcoins.

Even so, there is a way in which bitcoin, which is fundamentally a concept—an idea rooted in pure numbers rather than pegged to a physical asset like gold or silver—does not exist, at least not in the material world. That explains why, during that Homeland Security Committee hearing in 2013, Senator Thomas Carper called it a “virtual” currency. To quote him directly: “Virtual currencies, perhaps most notably bitcoin, have captured the imagination of some, struck fear among others and confused the heck out of the rest of us.”

That confusion arises in large part because bitcoin is based on an obscure mathematical formula developed by someone—or someones, it’s never been determined—going by the name Satoshi Nakamoto. Each bitcoin is created, or “mined,” by those who can provide the considerable computing powers to validate bitcoin transactions and ensure their security through a cryptographic function that produces a unique digital fingerprint for each one. (It’s an intensive process; special hardware is needed; the total number that can be mined has been capped by Satoshi at 21 million.) In the initial white paper outlining the bitcoin system published in 2008, Satoshi defines it as

a purely peer-to-peer version of electronic cash [that] would allow online payments to be sent directly from one party to another without going through a financial institution.

The intention was not to create a payment system that was ideal for the dark Net but, rather, to create a payment system that did not rely in any way on trust. It just happened that they were the same thing.

When the FBI seized the bitcoin computer accounts (called “wallets”) that they believed to be Ross Ulbricht’s, they were not completely certain that the accounts belonged to him. That

is because bitcoins are almost always purchased and held under false names. Though the address of every bitcoin transaction is posted online in a public ledger called a “block chain,” those addresses look something like this: 1JArS6jzE3AJ9sZ3aFij1BmTcpFGgN86hA. Unless a block chain address can be linked to an individual, that person will remain unknown, even though the transaction is not. Bitcoin patrons are advised to use different addresses for each transaction so those transactions are less likely to be associated with a single person. As one explanatory website puts it, this is “the equivalent of writing many books under different pseudonyms.”

But pseudonymous is not the same as anonymous: once the FBI was in possession of Ulbricht’s computer, its

That was last September. Nine months later, the FBI unmasked and arrested AmreekiWitness, who turned out to be a seventeen-year-old computer-savvy high school student in Virginia and ISIS supporter who had facilitated the journey of an eighteen-year-old friend from the United States to Syria to join the Islamic State. In August he was sentenced to eleven years in federal prison.

If ISIS is not yet using bitcoin, the prospect that it will in the near future worries Jennifer Calvery, the head of the US Treasury Department’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network. As she told a *Foreign Affairs* forum on cryptocurrency policy last February:

What keeps me up at night when I am thinking about digital currencies...the real threats out there,...



A billboard honoring Kurdish women soldiers who died while fighting ISIS, Rojava, northern Syria, 2015

agents found 144,000 bitcoins stored in his bitcoin wallets, as well as the digital keys to unlock them. From there they were able to trace all of his activities on the public ledger. As *Wired*’s Andy Greenberg observed after FBI agent Ilhwan Yum testified at the Silk Road trial, “If anyone still believes that bitcoin is magically anonymous internet money, the US government just offered what may be the clearest demonstration yet that it’s not.”

Still, bitcoin remains the currency of choice for dark-Net commerce and its offshoots. In July, the *Times* ran a story with the headline “For Ransom, Bitcoin Replaces the Bag of Bills,” noting how cybercriminals, especially, are partial to payments in the cryptocurrency. And it’s not just underworld hackers who are keen on bitcoin. A year ago a blogger going by the name “AmreekiWitness” (American witness) urged members of the Islamic State—many of whom already communicate on hidden dark-Net sites—to use the cryptocurrency, and offered instructions on how to do that. A bitcoin donation system, he wrote, “could send millions of dollars worth of Bitcoin instantly from the United States, United Kingdom, South Africa, Ghana, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, or wherever else right to the pockets of the mujahideen.”

But this, it turned out, was aspirational. In an exchange with a writer named Zubair Muadh on the website deepdotweb.com, AmreekiWitness, when asked if the Islamic State accepted bitcoins, said that it did not.

these days...we’re thinking a lot about ISIL.... How they’re moving their money, and how potential US-based individuals are becoming foreign fighters: Are they moving their money, can we identify them by the movement of their money? And what does it mean if they start moving that money through Bitcoin?

Even without the subterfuge of bitcoin, terrorists have become avid, if not sophisticated, digital natives. In its investigation “Jihadism on the Web,” the General Intelligence and Security Service of the Netherlands (AIVD) found several hundred jihadist websites and Internet forums worldwide, most of them on the dark Net. These, the report’s authors declared, are “the *de facto* core of the global virtual Jihad movement, propelling it like a turbo.” This was in 2012, before the Islamic State assumed its current form. Two years later ISIS was operating between 46,000 and 70,000 Twitter accounts, which it used for recruitment and propaganda. The group also had developed its own Twitter application, “Dawn of Good Tidings,” to provide adherents with the latest jihadi news while, in addition, giving ISIS leaders the ability to send tweets through users’ personal accounts. (Though dropped from the Google Play Store, the app still can be loaded onto Android phones.)

As novel as these uses of the Internet might seem, it’s important to put them

into perspective. The Internet long has been home to extremists of every stripe who have used it to disseminate and amplify their message. In the 1980s and 1990s, before the invention of social media, and before even the creation of the World Wide Web, white supremacist groups like the Aryan Brotherhood and Stormfront figured out how to use bulletin board systems and Usenet groups to communicate with and rally members. Since then, as Bartlett reports, the Stormfront website stormfront.org “hosts a long-standing forum, which has close to 300,000 members, who between them have posted close to ten million messages.” Moreover, a study of terrorism on the Internet from 2003–2004 by the United States Institute for Peace found that

all active terrorist groups [worldwide] have established their presence on the Internet... [employing it for] psychological warfare and propaganda [and] highly instrumental uses such as fundraising, recruitment, data mining, and co-ordination of actions.

Extremists and terrorists, in other words, use the Internet like everyone else. If, in the very early days of the Internet, their activities were largely obscure, it was because the technology itself was largely obscure. If those activities are opaque now, it is because they have been deliberately moved to the dark Net. As the Brookings Institute researcher J.M. Berger told a Senate hearing on social media and terrorism in May, once a potential recruit who has connected with ISIS on an open forum like Twitter or Facebook has expressed serious interest in taking the association further, the conversation usually moves to a more secure venue via one of the widely available and popular private messaging apps like Kik or WhatsApp, which are encrypted. Senator Ron Johnson asked Berger for clarification:

Johnson: Our authorities can follow the open source social media, but the minute those individuals who are really serious about it go offline, we go dark? We lose our capability of following that and we really have no idea? Is that correct?

Berger: Well, you can approach it with subpoena and other authorities....

Johnson (interrupting): If we can decrypt. That’s part of the problem, isn’t it? And Silicon Valley is resistant to allowing us to decrypt, and even if they were to allow it, there would be other sites offshore that will also encrypt. So we are losing our capability of being able to follow this.

Berger: Yes....

This exchange was reiterated a few weeks later during another congressional hearing, when Homeland Security Committee Chair Michael McCaul was questioning Michael Steinbach of the FBI’s counterterrorism division:

McCaul: I’ve read some of these Twitter accounts and Tweets, they have thousands of followers and thousands following, which means they are actively communicating...and then they go into

messaging. And then they go into a more secure space that if we have coverage, we can pick up that communication, but as you suggested in your testimony, then they have the ability to go onto what's called "dark space," to another platform that is secure-comm, that we don't have the ability to monitor.... Is that correct?

Steinbach: That is correct, sir.

One month later, at yet another congressional hearing, this one of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Steinbach's boss, FBI Director James Comey, stated flatly that Internet encryption was a public menace, arguing that the privacy rights established by the Fourth Amendment were not absolute. Then he asked for something fourteen of the world's leading cryptographers and computer scientists said was impossible in a study issued just the day before: a back door that would give law enforcement a way to decipher encrypted communications that would not, at the same time, compromise encryption more generally. "A whole lot of good people have said it's too hard," Comey told the senators, "but my reaction to that is: I'm not sure they've really tried."

Until the mid-1970s, encrypted messages were deciphered using a single key shared by both sender and receiver. This was its weakness. Not only did the message need to be transmitted, so did the method of decoding it. Then, in 1976, a team of mathematicians at MIT invented a much more robust two-key encryption system, where a public key was used to scramble the message and a private key was used to unscramble it, making strong, end-to-end encryption possible. Nearly two decades later, an antinuclear activist named Phil Zimmermann employed the public key protocol when he created the e-mail encryption program Pretty Good Privacy (PGP) to shield his group's messages from the prying eyes of the government. While PGP itself has gone through many iterations since then, Pretty Good Privacy remains a popular way to protect e-mails.

This was the program Edward Snowden required Glenn Greenwald to use before the whistleblower would communicate with the journalist, and the one many people installed on their computers after Greenwald revealed that the National Security Agency was collecting and reading the private electronic correspondence of ordinary citizens. And it was not only e-mail encryption they were downloading. According to Bartlett:

The daily adoption rate of PGP keys tripled in the months following Snowden's revelations. Anonymous browsers like "Tor" are becoming ever-more popular: there are now an estimated 2.5 million daily users.

Bartlett calls this "The Snowden Effect."

The other Snowden effect, this one pitched by members of Congress, the intelligence services, and the Obama administration, among many others, is that the Snowden leaks drove terrorists to use encrypted communications. This is their rationale for eliminating

encryption—the position, for example, of British Prime Minister David Cameron—or for creating the back door FBI Director Comey is after. In fact, as Glenn Greenwald has reported in *The Intercept*, Islamic terrorists have been using encryption and other dodges since at least 2002. Greenwald cites a document seized by British authorities and called by them "The Jihadist Handbook," which details these methods.

Simple math suggests that the majority of people adopting encryption or using an anonymizing browser, post-Snowden, are neither terrorists, extremists, drug dealers, nor pedophiles. The problem for law enforcement may not be that more terrorists are going dark, but that an increasing number of regular folk are, crowding that space and making the work of discerning bad guys from good much more labor-intensive.

Meanwhile, Silicon Valley, which was implicated in the leaked NSA documents as being a party to government mass surveillance, is trying to repair its image and regain customer trust and business by moving to strong encryption in both software and hardware. Google, for example, is adding end-to-end encryption to the traffic flowing between its data centers, Facebook is offering users the opportunity to add PGP to their messages, and IBM is encouraging buyers of its mainframe computers to install their own encryption programs, putting the company at an unreachable distance from customer data, should the NSA or FBI or GCHQ seek it.

The virtue of strong encryption—encryption that offers no back door—goes beyond a service provider such as Google being able to demur when the government comes calling. Strong encryption is one of the best defenses against online hacking. This summer's hack of the now infamous adultery site Ashley Madison, which saw the unencrypted data of its more than 32 million members dumped onto the dark Net, is a good example. The private nature of this material, which includes not only home addresses and phone numbers but also intimate details about sexual proclivities, made it ideal for blackmail and extortion. Within days, e-mails threatening exposure were being sent to people whose names were found in the cache, demanding a payment in bitcoins to be delivered to a dark-Net address.

Similarly, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) revealed in June that data on 4.2 million government workers had been stolen from its computers (ostensibly) by the Chinese. If that information—as well as information on another 21.5 million people that the agency admitted in July had been stolen—had been encrypted, it would be of little value. Instead, it may be used to identify covert intelligence agents and to gather compromising evidence on government workers. According to a report in the *Los Angeles Times*, Russian and Chinese operatives have begun aggregating and cross-indexing the OPM and Ashley Madison data to get an even more detailed and comprehensive picture of US intelligence operations and of persons vulnerable to exploitation and manipulation. According to the *Times*, one clandestine team working with US spies has already been exposed.

A door, whether in the back, the front, or the side, is still a door; open it for the good guys, and the bad guys are going to push on it, too. This may happen surreptitiously—no doubt a back door would be a target for hackers—but also overtly, with equally disastrous consequences. This was made clear in a letter recently delivered to President Obama by representatives of major technology companies and civil liberties groups. "If American companies maintain the ability to unlock their customers' data and devices on request," they wrote,

governments other than the United States will demand the same access, and will also be emboldened to demand the same capability from their native companies. The US government, having made the same demands, will have little room to object. The result will be an information environment riddled with vulnerabilities that could be exploited by even the most repressive or dangerous regimes.

From the start, intelligence agencies have been trying to break various kinds of Internet and digital encryption. Numerous documents in the Snowden cache show the many ways they have been successful. Among these, though, one document sticks out. It is called "Tor Stinks." Its gist is that try as it might, the NSA has had a difficult time cracking the Tor network. While this document, from 2012, may have given Tor users a sense of security, the capture of Ross Ulbricht while he was logged onto Silk Road, as well as the arrest earlier this year of three men who ran a major child pornography site through Tor Hidden Services, should give them pause. By hook or by crook, which is to say by using malware and software vulnerabilities, the FBI and the NSA are actively working to breach Tor. Who would say that child pornography should not be stopped?

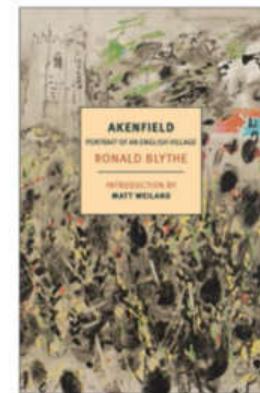
It turns out that even without resorting to intensive detective work, Tor's anonymity can be penetrated. In a paper published online, Paul Syverson, one of Tor's original developers at the Naval Research Laboratory, along with four colleagues, demonstrated that users who regularly browsed the Internet with Tor could be easily identified. "Our analysis," they wrote,

shows that 80% of all types of users may be deanonymized... within six months [and] roughly 100% of users in some common locations are deanonymized within three months.

More recently, security experts have devised a simple way to distinguish Tor users by their particular style of typing. Add to these a new search engine called Memex, designed specifically to troll the dark Net, developed by the Defense Department's research arm, DARPA. It already has successfully unmasked human traffickers working in secret.

This may be the ultimate Snowden effect: even as encryption gets stronger, even as companies resist adding back doors, even as average users opt for privacy over transparency, the darkest recesses of the Internet, for better and for worse, are being illuminated. □

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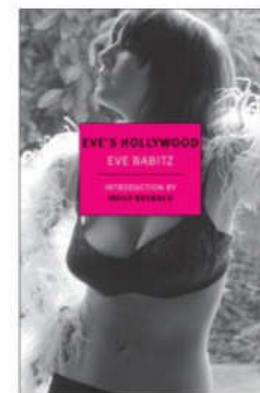
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LETTERS

OUTRAGEOUS UNIVERSITIES

To the Editors:

Professor Andrew Delbanco is likely to mislead readers with his unqualified affirmation [“Our Universities: The Outrageous Reality,” *NYR*, July 9]: “given the proven advantages for the college-educated in the form of higher wages and lower unemployment....” A college degree does confer advantages over a high school degree. But this so-called college premium is not because the income of college grads has increased over the years. Instead, the median earnings of those with a bachelor’s degree have steadily decreased for more than a decade. But the wages of high school graduates have decreased even more. Thus, the differential economic consequences of a college degree ought to be called the “high school discount.”

There is more to this matter than the correct name of a phenomenon. It may open the door to a deeper understanding of the relation between educational credentials and socioeconomic inequality, which is the central concern of his essay. According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, for the decade until 2022 there will be 19 million college graduates competing for the estimated 3 million jobs requiring a college education. Even if only roughly correct, the mismatch between the supply of and demand for college graduates suggests that the faith in college education as the ladder to “the blessings of American life” may be misplaced at best, and misguided at worst.

Sajay Samuel

Clinical Professor of Accounting
College of Business
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, Pennsylvania

Andrew Delbanco replies:

Real wages are indeed stagnating for many Americans, including college graduates. But Professor Samuel does not dispute that those with a college credential tend to do better than those without. The central concern of my essay was to show that we are rationing this asset by making it inaccessible to students without means.

As for the projected relation between the number of college graduates and the number of future jobs “requiring a college education,” see Anthony P. Carnevale and Stephen J. Rose, “The Economy Goes to College: The Hidden Promise of Higher Education in the Post-Industrial Service Economy” (www.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/EconomyGoesToCollege.pdf), which concludes that higher-skill jobs are a growing share of the overall economy. Colleges cannot fix America’s inequality problem, but we are worsening it by narrowing college opportunity for the children of low-income families.

WAS PLATO ‘CHURLISH’?

To the Editors:

Joyce Carol Oates’s wide-ranging essay “Inspiration and Obsession in Life and Literature” [*NYR*, August 13] contains some powerful poetic interpretation, but begins with a long screed against the “essentialist” Plato, whose “churlish” view of poetry treats inspiration as irrational and demands that poets be “banished from the claustrophobic Republic.” The soundness of this view of Plato (who wrote dialogues, not treatises) is debatable; but Oates got wrong the statement in her closing parenthesis: “In one of the great ironies of history, it was to be Plato’s Socrates who was banished from the state.” She implies that Socrates was executed (in 399 BC) after Plato wrote the *Republic*, but that dialogue surely came some decades later. This is not of mere antiquarian interest; Plato, the most poetic of all ancient prose stylists, knew rather more

than most the costs of utopian thinking.

I should locate the irony rather in Oates’s use of the term “irony,” for she grants none to Socrates, even though this has always been his most famous attribute. She says that Socrates’ speech in the *Ion* is told “with the plodding quasi logic of a right-wing politician,” without recognizing that he is working to perplex his interlocutor, the rhapsode Ion, who boasts of tremendous abilities simply because he knows how to interpret poetry!

Christopher Moore

Assistant Professor
Department of Philosophy and Classics
The Pennsylvania State University
State College, Pennsylvania

Joyce Carol Oates replies:

Thanks for this correction, though I am not sure that there is much essential disagreement here about Plato’s injunction against what he calls “mimetic” art: the representation not of eternal Forms that are the only true objects of real knowledge but of mere appearances, or imitations of reality. It would seem to be quite commonly known that, building upon this (dubious) epistemological argument, Plato goes on to banish epic, tragic, and comic poetry from the ideal state (*Republic*, Book X). The expurgation of Homer, Aeschylus, and by extension all dramatic artists from the ideal state is justified in that their art is “mimetic” and thus debased, exciting, and corrupting to the young.

That dictatorial nation-states cannot tolerate poetry, fiction, any sort of imaginative art is well known in history, and hardly needs to be reexamined. My point in my essay is that, in fact, Plato is mistaken in thinking that poetry is a kind of automatic stream-of-conscious babble created by “no mind”; the examples of poets as diverse as Dylan Thomas, Elizabeth Bishop, Philip Larkin, and William Butler Yeats make it clear that poetry is a consciously crafted art—“We must labour to be beautiful” (Yeats, “Adam’s Curse”). In other words, it isn’t just that Plato would banish poetry from the state in order to control the minds of the citizenry but that his conception of poetry is crudely incomplete, distorted, and misleading—indeed, “churlish” and “right-wing.”

HIGHER EDUCATION’S FUTURE

To the Editors:

On Tuesday, October 13, at 6:00 PM, the Center for Public Scholarship at the New School in New York City will host a discussion, “The Problematic Future of Higher Education,” with David Bromwich (Yale), Andrew Delbanco (Columbia), Richard Kahlenberg (Century Foundation), and Marina Warner (Birkbeck, University of London). The discussion will focus on the challenges confronting universities such as increasing inequality, and crippling student loan debt, and ask how these challenges are likely to impact the future. The event is free and open to the public. To register go to www.newschool.edu/cps/problematic-future-higher-education.

Arien Mack

Director, Center for Public Scholarship
The New School for Social Research
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This will be the Institute's second Director, after a start-up phase that has established a Faculty, a program of Visiting Research Scholars, a doctoral program, and regular exhibitions. The Director will be expected to build upon ISAW's international standing and influence in the study of antiquity, and one crucial component in coming years will be the placement of doctoral students in academic positions and the development of these ISAW scholars into leaders in their various areas of study. The Director will need both to work productively with existing people and structures, and to consider how to move toward these long-term goals with creative energy and a clear sense of direction. ISAW depends for its vision on extensive collaboration at many levels within the university, in New York City and the region, and in networks of scholars around the world, and the Director must continue to strengthen these connections.

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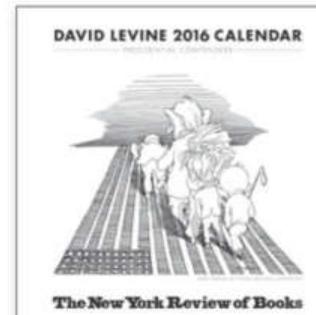
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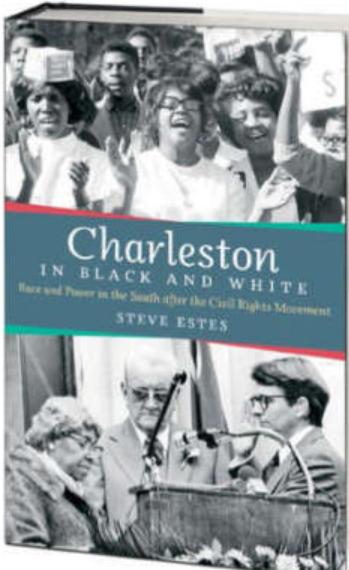
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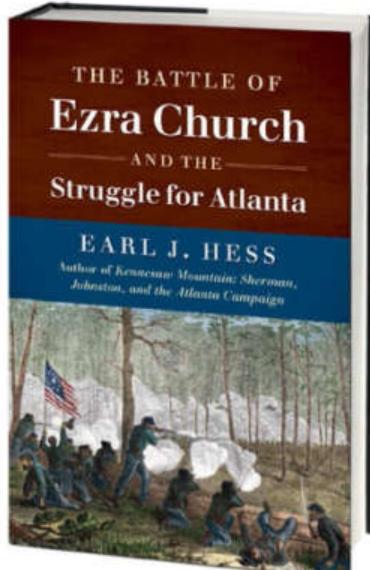
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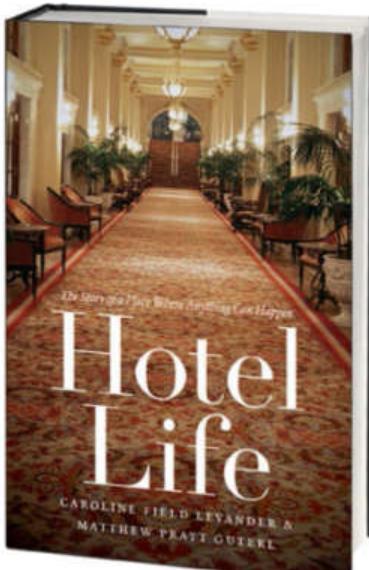


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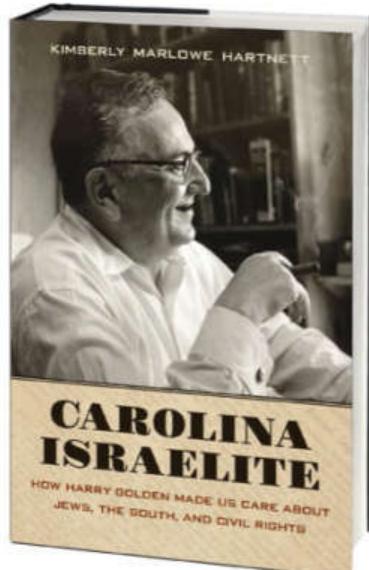
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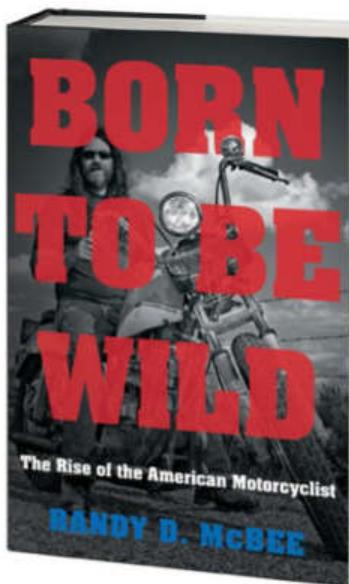
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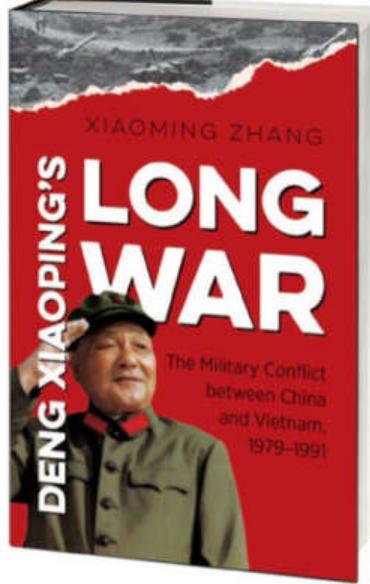
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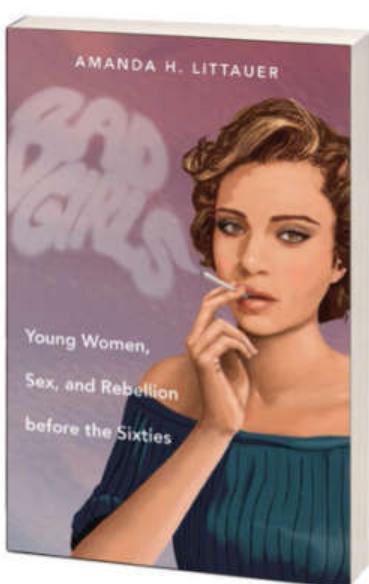
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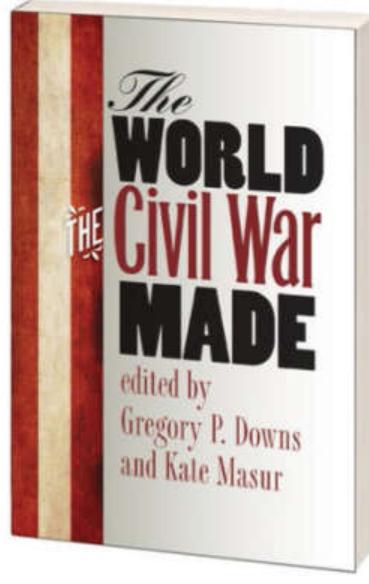
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